The Ancient Fires of Midgard

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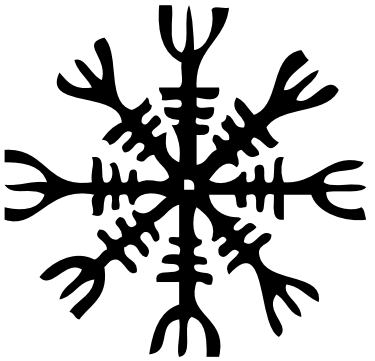

The Ancient Fires of Midgard:

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For Alva – my lovely little elf…

INTRODUCTION

I have always felt different from the crowd. I thought much more about life than others my age did. I had deep emotions, intense dreams, visions and magical experiences, I felt very connected to animals, had a great interest in ancient cultures, and I loved gloomy and gothic images. I was intensely drawn to 'creatures of the night' like vampires and werewolves (who really are merely symbols of our natural instincts), supernatural tales etc.

Many things the 'ordinary' people did, made not much sense to me. I reacted to the respectless way people treated nature and animals with, the way they treated each other. I reacted to the kind of low behaviour I often saw in the streets. I felt really out of place. As a child I was very fond of the American Indians. They had pride, they knew how to survive. When I saw these stupid wild west movies I was angry to see how the American Natives were demonised... the cowboys's low life behaviour is a true representation of all I dislike...

I was always searching for something deeper, higher, more passionate – perhaps a life in another world. I always believed that there were other worlds, worlds parallel to our own world. I still wonder if beings from these parallel worlds visit our world, yet most of us cannot see them. Often when I walk, alone with the wind blowing around me, I wish that time could stand still. I yearn to go "home", a home that I don't know where to find.

I always wanted to feel truly alive, to try everything once, to dare, to play with life… and I have at times put myself into negative situations… simply to test if I was capable of getting myself out of them again… which I always did. Life is a peculiar game…

In the early 90's I moved to London, where I was a part of the gothic- and alternative music scenes. Here I met my first influences and

inspirations to explore the darker aspects of life. I travelled around Britain, living short periods of time in places that seemed interesting. Then I moved back to London, where I studied "the biological basis of human behaviour". Here I really learned how biologically close we are to animals and how unaware people are of their natural instincts.

I realised how the patriarchal religions are responsible for much of the unnatural behaviour we see in our society. The lack of respect for nature and animals, suppression of the feminine forces, no tolerance to other-thinking people and other religions. It's all in their holy books.

The natural spiritualities on the other hand teach a balance between forces, balance within, respect for nature and all other creatures… and most of all self-respect. If one respects the self than one also respects others.

I connected with different witch- and magical organisations (and the early Neo-Folk music movement, whose occult outlook inspired me a great deal…) and truly started to work with my inner self. With it I got really interested in the myths and mysteries of my ancestors. I think it is really important to know and understand our own culture and why we practise our local customs. I wanted people to understand why we celebrate Christmas and Easter, what our traditions originally were about. This is why I wrote this book. I try to interpretate the spirituality of northern Europe - the myths, folklore, superstitions, natural wisdom and magical traditions. In my very own way.

But even though this book focuses on the myths and traditions of northern Europe, many chapters discuss life's mysteries, magical practise, goddess worship and my thoughts on human nature in general. After all I am inspired by the mysteries of life... and particularly the lunar side of life in general... Please keep this in mind. Even though I know a lot about the old Germanic traditions I am not a representative for the Germanic religion. I consider myself to be more of an 'universal' pagan or witch. I am a seeker, an artist who has experienced many strange things in her life. And what I want most of all with my music, art and writings is that people free their minds and think for themselves.

More and more people become free thinking individuals and show respect for the earth, for animals and search for life's mysteries. And I really hope this is a true step in the right direction and not just a fashion. Life as a journey, with new possibilities and also many obstacles... there are always new beginnings in life...

I hope this book will inspire you. To really understand the Pagan way of thinking you have to look inside yourself. Let your inner voice be your guide.

THE PAST IS ALIVE

The word “Pagan” originates from the Latin word “Paganus”, which means “villager”. The word “Heathen” has a similar meaning, referring to the people from “the heath” (“Heide” in German, “hede” in Norwegian). Like their environment, these people were uncultivated and free. They lived by the principles of nature and as a part of nature. Their polytheistic faith had a deep spiritual connection with the environment of their native land.

Sadly, many people that hear the words Pagan or Heathen today tend to imagine terrible savages from a dark period a time long ago, before civilisation. They imagine barbarians that celebrated dark macabre rituals, where the Pagans offered up human sacrifices to evil Pagan Gods, a time of horror and fear. People also imagine humans of low intelligence and no emotions. When we imagine a caveman, we see a picture of a man dragging a woman by the hair. We learned that the Vikings were brutal men that plundered monasteries. We learned that witches were evil women in service of the devil, casting wicked spells on God-fearing people.

These images and ideas are communicated through books, movies and, in the old days, these stereotypes were even taught in schools. Yet what most people know of the Pagan way of life is the direct descendant of the stories spread by the early Christians, meant to demonise those that stuck with the old ways and old Gods when Christ came knocking on the door of Europe.

Much has been written about the Viking raids, for example. While the Vikings are condemned as plunderers who attacked the monasteries along the coasts of France and Britain, people don’t seem to wonder how the monks and clergymen came to hold such treasures. A lot of these worldly goods were, in fact, stolen from the peasants in order to “save their immortal souls”. Salvation was indeed expensive.

And how did the Vikings know about the rich pickings to be found in the monasteries in the first place? Their keen knowledge of where to plunder suggests that the Vikings had already made contact with men of the Church and knew of their Roman Catholic greed. Torgrim Titlestad suggests in his book Kampen om Nordvegen that the Vikings did not attack the monasteries out of greed, but because they felt threatened by Christian Europe. The attacks could also have been an act of revenge.

Little has been written of the Church’s cruelty in christianising the people. Many Pagans were forced to convert to the new faith. Statues of the Pagan deities were respectlessly destroyed. In fact, the Church destroyed many ancient cultures all over the world. I get really angry when I read about ancient cultures that were blooming for thousands of years and of the amazing things they discovered about life’s mysteries. Then suddenly the missionaries came and burned all that ancient knowledge, leaving a once proud and wise people with basically nothing else than a Bible.

After centuries of being dominated by Christian morality, society is still very much influenced by their dogma. Even if people do not consider themselves Christian, they are very unaware of how the patriarchal religions have destroyed their ability to think naturally.

Christianity has taught us duality, the narrow idea of good and evil and the struggle between the two. Cutting off one half of a whole creates severe disharmony. Because of this view that things are either good or evil, never in-between, people can no longer think in a balanced way. They cannot understand diversity; they have to fall from one extreme into the other and cannot see an issue from different angles.

Sometimes I am annoyed when I see movies, in particular Fantasy films. These films often feature mythological beings, magic and mystery, yet are always based on the Christian concept of the battle of good against evil. There is always the good guy and the bad guy. The bad guy always seeks to totally destroy the world. This concept is immensely immature, not to mention extremely unrealistic. Nothing is entirely good or entirely bad. Life is not that simple. The Pagans would never have thought in that manner. Total destruction could never happen in the Pagan world, as the Pagan understands that life is a cycle. Thus, after every ending comes a new beginning. Death is a part of life, and this process is necessary for the world to continue. Old life has to make way for new life. The way western society feels about death is very different. Death is considered morbid, a taboo subject.

Many people in our society would scream in fear or disgust at the sight of a human skull or human bones. Why? They have a skull under their own skin. They have bones; they have blood flowing through their veins, yet if they see blood or a skull in a private household, their reaction is hysterical. They don't want to be reminded of their own coming death, and a *memento mori* like a skull does just that. Individuals who are fascinated by the macabre and gloomy image of death, who don't fear the darker side of life and who, for example, find black clothing and so-called gothic make-up attractive, are often judged by the ignorant crowd to be abnormal, if not outright evil. It might be a common assumption that such individuals don't want to live, but the truth is quite the opposite. In seeking to know the mysteries of death, the individual also seeks to understand the mysteries of life – in order to live it to the fullest.

Fear of the supernatural and death is also often displayed in many superficial films. A typical example of this is an individual 'messing around' with Tarot cards. Of course, the card symbolising death appears in his or her reading and the individual is in a state of shock from getting the death card, which gloomily predicts that the individual will suffer a premature death in the very near future. The creators of such movies and TV shows appear to have no idea that the death card in a Tarot reading merely represents the ending of the present situation and the beginning of a new phase in the individual's life. Thus, it usually is a positive card.

The Pagans believed death to be a passing over into another form of life. To the Northern people, the other side was a place where feasts and sexual pleasures could be freely celebrated. Loved ones were also reunited. In many Pagan cultures, the underworld, the world of the dead, was also a place of wisdom often consulted by the mortals. The Christians called this consultation necromancy, and demonised the practice.

In Pagan societies, men and women who reached old age were shown a lot of respect for their wisdom and experience. The elders often knew when their time had come to depart from this world and prepared themselves for their passing over. They were thus respected until the end of their earthly life. The Northern people had a saying: "By your death you will be remembered".

In modern society, a disturbingly high number of the elderly are placed in old people's homes where they are being looked after by people not related to them. Here they await death, a death that doesn't come easy – for a natural departure is often prevented. They are driven back and forth from hospital, put on life-support machines to keep bodies that collapsed long ago alive. Having more or less died already, they often lie there lonely and forgotten. This is inhumane. By understanding the Pagans' acknowledgement of death, I think this attitude could easily be changed and the elderly may once again be allowed to die with their dignity intact.

Still, I think the patriarchal religions have caused the most damage by destroying the natural relationship between men and women. This they did by demonising and suppressing the feminine aspects and, in particular, natural sexual behaviour.

In ancient Pagan societies, the feminine was truly recognised. For

example, the first civilisations worshipped a Goddess as their highest deity, the Great Mother – Mother Earth. The nurturing giver and taker of life, the great womb we all come from and to which we will all return. The oldest statues representing the Goddess that have been found were around 35,000 years old.

People held fertility-rites in honour of the Great Mother. The union of man and woman and the creation of life was celebrated as something sacred. The moment of giving birth was considered very powerful, and the woman was then at one with the Mother Goddess. Our own mother is our own very first love, naturally, she is the first person that means everything to us. She is the person we are first bound to, she is the one that imprints us during this crucial first phase of life. In short, she is the one that shapes us the most.

There is a rich variety of myths around the world that tell us that life came to be through a female animal, a she-beast that nurtured a God or a human being. The ancient woman established the first bonds between animals and humans by breast-feeding the young animal. Not surprisingly, she was believed to have a close soul-kinship with the wild beasts. As we will see later, Northern mythology shows us that the feminine is the key to hidden wisdom. Every culture had its wise women, witches, seers, herbalists, healers and priestesses. And, as we can see within the patriarchal powers, these women's natural jobs were taken over by men who, more often than not, didn't really understand the arts they were adopting.

Even today, in many tribal societies, we can see that women celebrate many ceremonies. The night, the moon, magic, imagination, understanding and the unknown are all associated with the feminine. Aspects such as these were an integral part of the ancient people's every-day life, yet as we know in our western society, these aspects have very little or no importance at all.

The patriarchal, monotheistic religions teach us that one male God has created life. All by himself. No union of Mother Earth and Father Sky, no female entity that gave birth. The God of Israel supposedly created man in his image and thereafter he made woman out of Adam's rib in order to be his companion. In comparison, Northern mythology's first man and woman, Ask and Embla, were created *equally* from two trees, an ash and an elm.

In the Bible we can read - considering that the Bible and all other "books of truth" have been re-written, edited and deliberately misquoted throughout the ages - that woman is "the source of all evil", responsible for the "fall of man" (Genesis 3). Here, the all too human (and all too male!) authors of the Bible clearly admit how powerful and manipulative they knew women to be. Eve is the original sinner; she tempted Adam to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge, after the snake made the idea slither into her mind. The snake has been a symbol of fertility in ancient Mediterranean cultures, and so the fable of the apple may symbolise that Eve initiated sexual intercourse. The snake was further a symbol of female intuition, the third eye. This shows us that it is woman who makes man aware of hidden knowledge. The natural and powerful act of Eve enlightening Adam the Bible calls a "sin". She stole Adam's "innocence" (unawareness). For this, God causes Eve and her daughters for all time to suffer great sorrows; to be ruled by their husbands and to give birth in pain.

Needless to say the authors of the holy books were very hostile towards the opposite sex. Why exactly this extreme hostility to women came to be in the first place, I don't think we know for sure (...but they couldn't have had much luck with women I guess?). It might be interesting to note that all the forbidden features in the garden Eden are in fact Pagan sacred symbols: The snake, as mentioned above, the tree of life, which is called Yggdrasil in the North, the fruit (the apple), and the image of the nude man and woman. Reading Babylonian mythology, for example, we can easily see how the Bible has been influenced by these myths.

If we look at the Hebrew myth of Lilith, the first wife of Adam, we can see how the beautiful, sensual and independent woman was demonised. Because Lilith refused to lie underneath Adam during intercourse

(this version doesn't make any sense if we compare it to the biblical story of Adam and Eve's innocence), she was banned by Jehova for her disobedience and became a seductive demon that indulges in sex for purposes other than breeding. Lilith lures men to have sex with her and afterwards drags them down to damnation. I again wonder if with the image of Lilith the authors tried to show their contempt for Babylonian women.

The suppression and demonisation of woman and her most natural desires led to terrible frustration. If we look at the Middle Ages, where women were seen as creatures of the devil by the Inquisition, we see the cruelty that was practised against the focus of their fascination: Woman. For it was she that reminded them of what they were under the cloth – men with natural desires.

There have been women artists, philosophers and scientists in ancient societies (e.g. Hypatia from Alexandria, AD 370-415). But, as the history books have been underlain a male monopoly for hundreds of years, it shouldn't be surprising that all the great accomplishments of history seem to have been by men. With the patriarchal tradition, women were denied the right to express themselves and to show their potential and their minds were deliberately kept empty. This shows us just how anxious the male authorities were that women would outdo them if given the chance.

There have been female artists through the centuries, and many of them created magnificent art. But, as I read in a book called Old Mistresses by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, their talent was ignored and their works were never exhibited, the reason for this being that it was believed that a woman could only express her "indecent" and "hysteric" nature. There have also been female musicians and writers who have suffered the same prejudice. Female scientists had to be satisfied with getting the chance of being their husbands' assistants. If she herself had a great idea or even a discovery, the husband would most often take the credit for it. There have also been women that in order to fulfil their potential, disguised themselves as men. An example of this is of course the famous Joan of Arc. It makes you wonder exactly how many "great men" were actually men...

Having grown up with the patriarchal power that destroyed all sources of Goddess worship and that ignored the women who made history, historians of the past decades would not even consider looking for it, assuming that ancient Pagan societies were male-dominated, too.

I'd like to give an example of a typically Christian interpretation of history. I read a book (quite an outdated one, I should add) called The Achievements of the Vikings by P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson, who in many ways have misunderstood and misinterpreted their data about the Vikings. Discussing the laws of the Vikings, they claim that women had no saying and no rights in society, which as we will see later, is not true. They also refer to the Valkyries as Odin's "female slaves".

The Northern sagas make it quite clear what the Valkyries are. The authors further discuss Seidr-magic and describe how the "wizard gets into the trance" to do his ill work, seemingly unaware that it was mostly women, the Volvas, who were working Seidr magic.

The animal kingdom has further been perceived with patriarchal eyes. The big focus is on the dominant male who keeps his harem of females. The fact that it is the females who choose their male, not vice versa, is often ignored. With a different perception we could say that the fittest male is chosen and used as a kind of rent boy by the females to keep all the other males off their back (literally speaking!). If we look at the animal kingdom with open eyes, we can see that no female animal of a kind is oppressed or seen as threatening by its males, quite the opposite. This concept of natural male domination over females is an entirely man-made idea. Besides, the animal kingdom is diverse. The elephant herd is usually led by the oldest female, and in some animal species it is the males that take care of the offspring.

Dr. Sigmund Freud, who understood that society's problems are based on sexual complexes, sadly appeared to be influenced by his religion

when he made the claim that women are men who failed to grow a penis! Like many of his colleagues of psychology and medicine, who all somehow tried to prove that women were incomplete men, he failed to realize that men and women are complimentary halves, and that both halves are needed for the circle of life to continue.

When we understand the Pagan mysteries, we can properly understand men and women again. We can see our differences and start to build a unity. It is immensely important to dismiss the attitudes of the patriarchal religions. A society where women cannot participate as equals can never be a real society!
The past centuries have shown us how a society based only on the masculine aspect leads to suffering, injustice and destructiveness.

Without understanding, there is no knowledge. Reason cannot exist without the understanding of emotions. Some men argue that women would stay at home in the good old days. That is true, but so did the men, except when they were out hunting and fishing. For most ancient people the centre of life was the home – or, rather, the farm. The home was the family and the tribe, and the farm represented safety and the source of food.

Women and men had different jobs due to necessity, not out of sexism. Women would collect fruits and herbs in the woods, and bring the youngest children along with them to be nursed. Understandably, it would have been a little hard for the father to go out for a long hunting trip with a small baby! The reason why it was the men who were fighting, protecting the women and children, was not really because the women were too weak or cowardly to fight, but because they had to keep the children safe. If the women and children died, the future of the clan would die with them.

Today, society has left the little village. Rather, the new technology has made us part of the global village. Both men and women must be part of this. Women must bring feminine values into positions of authority to balance out the male dominance. They must speak up and decide on issues that concern them in particular, issues like children, natural childbirth, environmental issues, education, nutritional and medical issues. Most of all they must gain respect as women. They must once again show off their natural creativity and express themselves artistically. They must be aware of their great qualities and that their gift of enchantment is an immense tool of power.

Our society is very preoccupied with sex. That sex sells is a tired cliché that is proved to be true on a daily basis by the sleazier parts of the media. Not surprisingly, Christian fundamentalists interpret this to mean that we have become immoral. However, all that has happened is that we have become more open about this subject. Sex is, always has been and will always be, our most primal urge. We should be aware of this urge, and be in control of, but not suppress, our sexuality. By accepting sex as something natural and passionate, without exploiting it as something dirty or naughty (as it is often presented to us in hardcore pornographic films), it would help to re-establish a sense of self-worth and a sense of security in ourselves. The man who has a natural relationship to his own sexuality will also have a more natural relationship to women. They can therefore communicate with women in a natural manner. They do not see women as a threat, but enjoy the company of independent and sexually confident women. And strong women enjoy the company of confident men.

Men and women are opposite poles. We do and think very differently, and this is why we are attracted to each other. We need complete men and complete women. Men have to become aware of their natural qualities and women of theirs. The acknowledgement and appreciation of our differences and the equal importance of both sexes is needed for men and women to live in harmony and mutual respect. As long as the patriarchal, monotheistic religions still dominate parts of our society, this can never be fully achieved. It is thus very important for our natural relationship to resurrect the ancient mysteries and the Pagan way of thinking.

Spirituality should enhance our natural possibilities, give more

opportunities and expand the mind – not close it. Pagan beliefs are free of written dogmas, and the individual can develop his or her potential. Even if Gods have different names and customs differ, Pagan spiritualities unite us by the universal worship of Mother Nature and the forces that give us life. I truly believe that reintroducing the traditions of our ancestors is essential in order to give people a more natural view of the world, a more positive lifestyle. The Pagan traditions also make us aware of the need for diversity, as we learn to appreciate all the different things nature has created.

However, I don't mean to say that in Pagan times there was no suppression, or that all animals were treated kindly and life in general was great. This idea of a Pagan utopia would be wrong. Life was very hard back then (just imagine five kids and no washing machine…) and cruelty has sadly always existed. However, spiritual concepts have a great influence on human action, and the Pagan concept is a lot more respectful and tolerant. It is written in the Bible that God said "let them have dominion over the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 2). I think this sentence is largely responsible for the disrespectful manner in which man has treated nature and animals and why the earth is as exploited as it is. We must once again recognise that we are not above nature, but a part of it.

Yet, there has already been a positive response to these problems. More and more people are searching for answers, for spiritual awareness and for themselves. In addition, with the growing cities, more and more individuals, fed up with today's unnatural lifestyle and cold technology, look back to the past to rediscover the wisdom and traditions of their Pagan ancestors. Ancient natural therapies and herbal remedies have found their way back to us. The alternative scene is blooming. Ancient body-art traditions, such as tattoos, piercings, face and body-paintings have enjoyed a renaissance among young individuals. The tribal spirit is reborn. This is not just a weird new trend, as some people might claim. It is rather a true sign that the ways and wisdom of our ancestors never died in the first place. Now that Christianity is increasingly losing its grip on our minds, it appears that the memory of our true self has come back to some of us. We dare to do things our own way and express ourselves again. We wish to be somebody in a group of like-minded individuals, not just a number in a huge crowd of other numbers. We are all unique individuals, we have different souls, we lead different lives and we have different needs. We are not all the same, even if the authorities seem to think we are.

The moralists say that since we have abandoned the commandments of Christianity as guidelines for life, the human species is falling to pieces. They claim that young people no longer have strict rules to follow and that they cannot handle making their own choices. In other words, they say that it is much better for us to do as we're told. That all this freedom isn't good for us. While I agree that many people today cannot handle their so-called freedom, I also think this is because they sadly have never been taught to be responsible for their own lives.

An individual should be able to realise his or her own life and should not need to be told what to think. Strong-willed people who take responsibility for themselves can generally make their own decisions, and they value their freedom very much. Now that we have opened the doors to our minds, we must not allow them to close. In addition, the modern world gives us something quite positive: Many different possibilities. We should take this chance and choose what is best for our individual selves.

The wisdom from the past has indeed survived. Times have changed and our lives have changed with them. Human nature, however, has not changed much, the cycle of life and death has certainly not changed and it is just as important now as it was then to understand ourselves and the forces around us. May the ancient flame burn once more!

UNDERSTANDING THE MYTHS OF THE GERMANIC PAGANS

The Germanic Pagans are the ancestors of the people who come from Northern Europe; from Scandinavia, Germany, Holland as well as Britain and Iceland. Their spirit is very much alive around and within us. They influenced our society in many ways. They are the foundation of our culture, our traditions, values, laws and, of course, our language. Many places still bear the original name given to them by our Heathen ancestors. Many ancient sacred sites still exist, even if some places of worship have been destroyed throughout the ages. This because the early Christians often had their churches built upon the sites that were already used as places of worship. Yet, the ground is still full of energy, waiting for us to remember.

The traditions of our ancestors were passed on from generation to generation, from old to young. The words of wisdom, as written down in the Håvamål, are advice to the individual, not morals to obey. They urge the individual to "be smart, be wise – think!" This shows quite clearly that you have to live by your own fate, but at the same time you are responsible for your own actions. The legends of the Germanic Pagans also show us values such as strength, honour, honesty, pride, courage and loyalty. Other virtues include sincere love and respect to friends and family, and hospitality towards guests.

The Germanic nations appear to have been a freedom-loving people who believed in religious tolerance. It was up to the individual whether he or she believed in the troth (the faith) or not. Some individuals dedicated themselves completely to the traditions, others didn't. Some couldn't be bothered with spirituality at all.

People of another faith were not usually condemned. The saga of the Norwegian king Olav Trygvason and Sigrid Stortråde can show us an example of how tolerance met with Christian intolerance. Olav forced many people into Christianity, and he killed many of those who did not wish to bow and kiss the cross. This king went to Sweden to propose to the rich widow Sigrid Stortråde. She still stuck with her Pagan beliefs, but said it didn't matter to her that Olav had become a Christian, as long as he would tolerate her belief in the old ways.

Rather than accept Sigrid's outstretched hand, Olav demanded that she must convert to Christianity. When she refused to give up her faith, Olav was outraged. He slapped Sigrid in the face with his glove and called her a "Heathen dog". Sigrid was very offended and, needless to say, the wedding never took place.

Ironically, it seems that it was the Pagan people's tolerance that enabled Christianity to spread amongst them in the first place.

Through the myths we can see that the ancient Gods never demanded obedience from the people they had created, and they did not punish them. By communicating with their Gods, the people just communicated with nature. The Gods and Goddesses represent the natural forces and are symbols of human qualities with all its aspects. The Pagans saw the value of life in everything, in every tree and in every stone. Because the early Christians could not see anything sacred about nature and animals, they thus suggested that the Pagans worshipped evil spirits.

There are numerous mysterious supernatural entities mentioned in the Northern mythology, and an individual influenced by Christian thinking would usually consider the trolls, giants and dwarves to be evil demons. These entities, however, are only symbolising dangers in nature that could be life-threatening for the person. They are a warning that, for example, an individual should never attempt to pass the mountains at

night in wintertime, the obvious reason being that the individual would most likely freeze to death.

On the other hand, the Germanic nations never believed in demons who tempted people to sin – in other words, to make use of their natural instincts.

The dramatic, yet humorous and fanciful tales of mythology reflect life and its joys and sorrows, creation and destruction. The myths make us understand nature, her kindness and her cruelty. They make us understand ourselves and others, our actions, our achievements and our failures. They show us our strengths and weaknesses. The Gods and Goddesses can thus be seen as divine role models. They are mighty and noble, yet they are vulnerable because they have desires and emotions like us. Each is a part of the whole, the whole man or the whole woman in their different roles and the different stages of life.

Myths are very complex, and one has to understand their symbolism in order to interpret them. One has to analyse them with an open mind and understanding of the Pagan view of life and the balance between the forces of nature. Some of these forces are regarded as feminine, others as masculine. The Gods have a hidden surface and shadowy aspects to their nature. To only worship the light aspects of the Gods and to ignore their darker aspects would create imbalance. Such is a very Christian thing to do, and only shows a lack of real understanding for the Pagan way of thinking. For the shadowy aspects are also a part of us. The Gods and Goddesses cannot be put into either black or white boxes. Studying the myths, one should remember that a story does not necessarily describe a deed between people, but merely symbolises a happening in nature.

Odin: Odin is probably the best-known Northern deity today, but unfortunately he is also the most misunderstood. He is primary acknowledged as the personification of the sky. He is also known as the king of Asgard and the God of war, Valfather (father of the slain) to whose hall, Valhalla, fallen warriors will go. Thus, Allfather Odin has already been the victim of Christian misinterpretation. I have met people who worshipped him as the father of all, the father in the sky as if he was a Northern Jehovah. To further underline the Christian nature of this practise, these people would largely ignore all other deities. This kind of worship creates an imbalance, and thus it is no longer in the spirit of our ancestors. Such Odin-worshippers appear to have merely exchanged the God of the Bible with Odin, without understanding Pagan thinking, and they tend to be unaware of or even reject Odin's other aspects.

The early Christians, who made demons of the Heathen Gods, considered Odin to be the grim war-god of the Heathens, and there are indeed some individuals who appear to hail this demonised image of Odin, which shows us exactly how little they have understood. Replacing Jehova with Odin does not make one a Pagan and as we will see later, it is in fact Odin himself that makes us understand the great importance of the Goddesses.

Odin has many faces and many hidden sides to his character. He is the God of war, death and occult knowledge. He represents the warrior, the wanderer and the magician. The myths show very clearly that Odin is not concerned with suppressing neither the other Gods nor his worshippers. Unlike Zeus, the Greek God, who punishes Gods and mankind for disobedience like his Jewish colleague, Jehovah (I suspect that the Greek myths were Christianised to suit the patriarchal ideology).

In Asgard, the Gods always gathered to hold counsel in matters of importance. In this image, democracy was practised in the Northern societies. Kings and earls lived on farms, in close contact with the common people around them. They were not tyrants in fancy castles towering high above the peasants in the fields outside their walls. This was surely the reason why power-thirsty kings were so eager to christianise the people: An almighty God high above humans makes it easier to justify being a king high above peasants...

Odin is mostly concerned with the search for knowledge. He wanders

through the nine worlds in a constant quest for the secrets of life. For this he sacrificed an eye to the well of Mimir, which represents memory. He gave an eye in order to see, and he thus shows that knowledge has its price. Having gained the ability to see into the future, he discovered that all life eventually must pass, and that even the Gods must die. Odin also discovered the secrets of the runes. He hung himself for nine days and nine nights from the world tree Yggdrasil and wounded himself with his spear Gungnir, sacrificing himself to his higher self. Odin thus represents a true shaman. While being in the state between life and death, in a trance, he obtained his higher knowledge.

I think Odin's position as the king of Asgard shows that he symbolises higher consciousness – the higher self, which seeks knowledge and discovery. This also makes sense with his other aspects as the God of death, wisdom and shamanism. He is the host for dead warriors, and the Pagans would consult the realms of the dead for wisdom. When Odin wanders in disguise through Midgard, the world of humans, he is often accompanied by two Ravens, Hugin and Mugin (thought and memory), and two wolves, Geri and Freki.

One very interesting thing is that Odin depends very much on women. He always seeks advice from the Norns, who are the sisters of fate, and his consort Frigga. Odin raised a mighty Volva from her grave, in order to learn his fate, which is detailed in the Voluspå. He is further assisted by the Valkyries, the choosers of the slain, who bring the fallen warriors to Valhalla. This shows clearly that the Northern people understood that wisdom and occult knowledge are feminine. Odin, in order to understand the mysteries of life, has to be aware of the feminine within his own subconscious.

The Northern practice of Seidr - shamanism and sorcery, was believed to be a gift given to the female sex alone. It is believed that if men wanted to take part in Seidr, they had to become women in spirit. The art of Seidr was taught to Odin by Freya, thus he must have made contact with the feminine side within himself.

Many other tales tell of Odin's meetings with Goddesses and mistresses and women whom he seduced, often to gain something from them. This not only describes how nature is made fruitful, but also symbolises his need for feminine forces to achieve his goals.

Odin is the seeker of knowledge. Thus, he is the patron of the Volva, the shamans, the rune-workers, priests and priestesses, Skalds and poets. He is invoked for higher knowledge, communication with the dead, creativity, inspiration, poetry, magic, leadership and victory. Odin's symbol is the Valknut (three interlinked triangles, symbolising the nine worlds), his tree is the ash, he bears the spear or the rune-staff and the colour dedicated to him is royal blue.

Seeker Divine

Gentle breeze my mind revives
longing eyes gaze into the sky
high above two ravens fly
Can this not be a sign for me?
High one are you guarding me?

Hidden face with many names
one-eyed master of disguise
unknown you wander for few to see
mystery-man, are you watching me?
I seek, I yearn, will you answer me?

Come Odin, come wise Odin
Keeper of thought and memory
seeker of shadows, seeker of truth
my thirst for life I offer to you

Come Odin, come one-eyed Odin
Lord of battle and self-sacrifice
wounded king raise the spirit in me
your guidance shall be my victory

I seek your thoughts, you seek my kind
shaman, you met the feminine side
ancient secrets, ecstasy cries
Master of runes, will you show me?
Seeker Divine will you join with me?

Frigga: Frigga is the queen of the heavens, the weaver of clouds. She knows the fates of all living things, yet is silent about it. While Odin quests for knowledge and attempts to change the way of fate, Frigga knows the flow of fate and has always done so. With this awesome knowledge on her side, the myths tell us that Frigga has outwitted Odin in several occasions (an example is the Longbeard's Saga).

Frigga represents the noble and beautiful lady, the respectable wife and the devoted mother. Little wonder that she was one of the most beloved deities of our ancestors. Frigga was the guardian of the home, and the patron of its wives, mothers and children. She was invoked to protect the family and she was called upon to ease childbirth as well as a death (see the entry on Holda).

Frigga was the protector of the mistress of the house. The mistress would run the house and farm, which meant that she was in charge of the household. Back then, life evolved around the home and the woman of the house enjoyed considerable status. Her symbol of power was the bundle of keys to all doors. The housemistress was responsible for the nutrition and the health of the people in her care. She also organised the seasonal religious gatherings, and was expected to be able to act independently. The more skilled, proud and determined she was, the more respect she gained.

Frigga also symbolises the grieving mother, for she lost her most beloved son, Balder. In a tragic way she herself brought about his death. Frigga knew it was Balder's fate to die, and just once she attempted to change fate's will by making all living things promise not to hurt Balder. Yet, she had ignored one little plant that hardly seemed harmful, the mistletoe. Loki, the trickster, ever envious of Balder's popularity, soon tricked out of her that there was indeed one thing that never vowed not to hurt Balder. He thus made sure that the young God was shot with a mistletoe missile and killed. Even if Frigga had great magic, she could not change the way of fate. Yet by her fear and desperation to save her son, she

herself caused his death. This death of Balder represents the dying of the sun.

Frigga had the sympathy of all devoted parents, who understood her terrible suffering, and therefore called upon her to protect their children. Again we can see how people identified with the Gods and Goddesses. Odin, the seeker of knowledge, was invoked by the searching ones. Frigga, the grieving mother was invoked to keep children safe. Other examples are the Goddess Freya, who was invoked for love, even when she was searching the worlds for the loved one who left her, weeping her golden tears. There is also Tyr, the God of justice, who was forced to break his oath. You will read more about them later.

Frigga's animals are the falcon and the spider, her colour is silver-grey – like the clouds she spins. Her symbols are the distaff and the spindle.

Thor: Thor was one of the most popular Gods in the North, in fact, he was the God of the people. He was the God of commoners, the friend of farmers and the protector of the community and the land. Being the God of agriculture and the patron of the working man, Thor represents brute, male strength. He is very big, almost giant-like, with a short temper, but a good heart. Thor is also the God of thunder, and the people believed that when it thundered, Thor was driving across the sky in a chariot pulled by two goats, swinging his hammer Mjøllnir. This hammer represents potency, the male force of fertility.

With his hammer Thor protects people and Gods alike against ill forces. His constant fight against the giants may also symbolise his fight against destructive forces within the self, forces that would not only harm the self but also the community. A pendant in the shape of Thor's hammer was worn to gain his protection, and was a symbol of the old faith itself, showing again his importance. Many healing plants were held sacred to him, which, plugged with the first thunder, were believed to have magical powers. The myths of an angry Thor chasing Loki (the personification of fire or lightning), or the myths of Loki and Thor travelling together, appear to represent thunderstorms.

With the sign of the hammer people hallowed the land and the community against harm. We should revive this tradition to protect our earth from damage, strengthening the Pagan community in the process.

Thor's animals are the goat and the bear. His symbols are the hammer and the sun-wheel, and the colour sacred to him is red.

Frey and Freya are twins and their names mean "lord" and "lady". Being of the Vanir Gods (the Vanir Gods pre-date the Æsir Gods), they represent the ancient principles of fertility. Frey and Freya were two of the most popular Gods and worshipped in fertility rites.

While Thor represents male potency, Frey – the beautiful God with a large erect phallus – represents sexual attraction and fertility, lust and the joys of physical love. Frey is a clear indication that sexual pleasure certainly was not taboo in Heathen times. He is also the God of peace, prosperity, gladness and devotion. No weapons were allowed into his places of worship. Frey is the patron of games, festivals, marriages and celebrations and the drinking vessel was raised to him to ensure plenty and good times. Frey represents the summer sun and the warm rain showers that make the earth green. The boar is his symbol, and the flesh of the boar was eaten in the Yuletide in his honour. The horse was also an animal associated with Frey, and the erect penis of a stallion was worshipped in fertility ceremonies.

Frey is the ruler of Alfheim, the home of the elves, who do kind deeds in Frey's name. The elves are responsible for the growth of plants and trees and for the well-being of the animals in the forest. As Frey was invoked to ensure fertility, he can be compared to the "horned God", like the Celtic Cernunnos, "the green man", or the Greek God Pan. These are all Gods of nature, representing fertility and our untamed instincts. Frey can thus even today be invoked to protect the nature and the animals around us, who are killed in the name of progress and ignorance.

Frey's symbol is the ship and his tool is the sword, with the latter probably representing the phallus. His rune is Inguz and, indeed,

another name for him is *Ing*. England was dedicated to him.

Freya appears to be the most complex and most acknowledged of the Goddesses. On and off, she was certainly the most popular female deity. Freya has many hidden aspects, like Odin, and she has many particular similarities to him. She thus appears to be Odin's female counterpart. Freya is primarily seen as the Goddess of love, fertility, sensuality and courtship. Yet she is also the Goddess of war, death and witchcraft (Seidr). Freya was worshipped by lovers and unmarried girls. She was also invoked at weddings and fertility rites.

Freya represents the young maiden – independent and glowing with life. She is the most beautiful of all Goddesses, with no small selection of admirers. Naturally, Pagan Goddesses of love and fertility were pictured as sexually attractive. They were meant to invoke desire, because lust leads to lovemaking and eventually to the creation of new life. With both Frey and Freya we can see that sexuality was a sacred thing, and that both men and women lived out their passions. Women were in no way passive – something that was made more convenient by the fact that they knew about contraceptive herbs.

In Pagan cultures, the flesh was not separated from the spirit and sexuality was a part of both religious ceremonies and magical workings. Priests and priestesses were using this carnality to bring their spirits closer to the Gods, to the point that orgies were held in the temples.

It may be worth mentioning that words like "maiden" or "virgin" were used in old times to describe young or unmarried women (the German word for maiden "Jungfrau" simply means young woman). The words did not necessarily refer to chastity. The Christian idea of the undefiled virgin who is pure because she has not yet been touched by a man – does that not mean that they believe men to be unclean?
Erotic energy was also a part of the Seid rituals dedicated to Freya. This, as we will see later, makes perfect sense. Freya, the Goddess of life, is also the Goddess of death. Half the warriors that are slain on the battlefield will go to her, while the other half go to sit with Odin in Valhall. Freya, however, has the first pick of these deceased warriors and she herself is a Valkyrie, a battle-maiden. This shows us the gentle, fertile Goddess of love dressed in the armour of the adventurous woman. Thus we see that also this aspect of femininity was acknowledged and even admired. Though we have the myths of the Valkyries and other Goddesses and maidens in shields, scholars claim that there is no evidence for the existence of such women amongst our ancestors. Yet, Torgrim Titlestad writes in his book Kampen Om Nordvegen that the "Hervorsaga" appears to be based on actual facts. Hervor is a *skjoldsmøy*, a shield-maiden. Pagan mythologies around the world speak of women warriors and huntresses. And the Amazons of the Greeks were not mythical figures – they actually did exist.

Some sources describe the Valkyries as Odin's daughters, others as the daughters of kings that have achieved divinity. We have the Norse saga of king Augvald, for example. His daughters were brave shield-maidens who fought with him on the battlefield. Personally, I think that even though the Valkyries in the myths symbolise an aspect of femininity, the image of the airborne shield-maidens must have come from somewhere.

Freya is the mistress of Seidr magic. And, as already mentioned, she and Odin have similar qualities: They both deal with magic and welcome the slain into the afterlife. Freya is the mistress of the Volva (also called Vølva or Volven in Scandinavian, Woelwa in German), or Seidkona (Seid-woman), who lets her mind travel to the other side in order to bring wisdom back to the people.

The fact that Freya represents sexuality, fertility and earthly magic but also death shows that the Pagan people acknowledged the close connection between sex and death. An orgasm is indeed referred to as the "little death", as the moment of release resembles that of death: Both being ecstatic feelings, a relief, an outflow of energy, followed thereafter by relaxation. When Odin hung himself from the world tree Yggdrasil in order to receive the secrets of the runes, he no doubt empowered the mystic letters with his semen. This would mean that during that moment he must have been in a state of ecstasy, obtained by his pain and pleasure

at the same time, the struggle between life and death.

The Christian cleric Adam of Bremen describes a macabre sacrifice in honour of the fertility Gods. Every ninth year, the Volvas held a fertility rite, in which nine men and animals of the male species were sacrificed and hung from a tree. The men were symbolically married to Freya while their semen stained the earth, fertilising her. Even though we do not have any true evidence that such sacrifices indeed were practised, the rite makes sense if one considers how the Pagans thought about life and death (and I am not at all suggesting that we should revive such a custom!).

Freya, as well as the Greek maiden Persephone, are fertility Goddesses who are at the same time associated with death, thus they represent the eternal cycle of nature. The Indian Goddess Kali is often pictured while sitting on top of a man, having intercourse with him and cutting off his head at the same time. This macabre image symbolises destruction and at the same time recreation. It is the "little death", which enables the creation of new life. The man's ejaculation releases seed and the woman's orgasm sucks the seed into the womb, thus an orgasm for both partners were by nature designed to enable pregnancy. Sex is the creation of new life and death is the passing of life into another form of life. The circle continues.

Freya's animals are the cat, which symbolises female intuition, and the falcon. Her symbol is the Brisingamen necklace and the falcon coat. She can be invoked for love, enchantment, fertility, healing and for matters dealing with divination and magic.

Norns, Dises and Fylgias: The Norns Urd, Verdandi and Skuld are the three sisters of fate. They are the past, the present and the future. The Norns may be seen as the triple Goddess: The maiden, the mother and the crone. Urd represents the wisdom of old age, and has perfect memory of the past. Verdandi is the grown woman, the present, the known, the mother. Skuld, the young maiden, represents all that is yet to come. A veil covers her face, symbolising uncertainty. It is Skuld who cuts the thread of life, and she accompanies the Valkyries to choose among those warriors whose cord she has severed. She thus bears many similarities to Freya's shadow aspect, as Freya also appears as a Valkyrie, choosing the slain and also giving prophecy about the future.

Urd, the old woman represents memory and thus the collective consciousness of our people. She can be associated with Mimir, whose name means "memory", but also with the Goddess Hel, the keeper of the dead souls – our subconscious. Urd knows all about the past and, by trying to communicate with her in soul-journeys, we could surely learn a lot about our ancestors.

The Norns are powerful beings that weave the web of fate for all living things, including the Gods. This clearly shows that the people believed that higher feminine forces were deciding the course of their lives and deaths. The Norns are the only ones who know the Orlog. The Orlog is the law of the universe that has no beginning or end. The Norns do not create destiny, they only shape it according to the Orlog. The personal fate is called the Wyrd, and this Wyrd is also the mother of the Norns. Here we see again the primal mother at work – demonstrating that the first humans who became aware that a higher force was influencing their lives, assumed that this force was female. As mentioned before, the first ever deity was simply called Mother.

There are, altogether, accounts of 13 different Norns. This number corresponds with the moons in the lunar year. Naturally, the Norns were very important to our ancestors – and they were always invited to bless the newborn child with a good and successful life.

I am very aware of my own fate, and the Norns are no doubt the deities I try to communicate with the most. The Norns shape your way of Wyrd and they should always be recognised.

The Volva, the prophetess, consulted the Norns in her Seid-journey in order to see the fate of the people, or even to try to alter the way of the Wyrd. Such a prophetess was taken very seriously, and was highly

respected. She accompanied warriors to the battlefields and prior to any attack, the men would ask for her advice. As I mentioned earlier, a woman's council was often sought.

The Volva, or Seidkone, would also send out her fetch-animals (totem animals) to mentally attack the enemy and weaken him in battle. Women capable of this were also called *Hagedise*. This name refers to their ability to travel the other side (see Hagalaz) and to the Disir. The Disir are protective spirits with similar function (and identical gender) to the Norns. The Disir are the guardians of the community, and ceremonies were held in their name. Particularly women held Dise-Blots, which were of the same sexual and shadowy nature as has been described above. Freya is considered to be a Dise as well and one of her many names is Vanadis – the Dise of the Vanir. Even after Christianity was introduced, many people still secretly honoured the Disir. There are legends that tell of the Disir appearing to people who had undergone a Christian baptism, and dressed in black cloaks the feminine figures would wreak vengeance on those that had given up the old ways. The priests of the *Kvitekrist* (the White Christ) , of course, did not believe in this revenge of the Disir. They told the people that the sinister figures were demons, and blamed the whole thing, not surprisingly, on witches.

The Fylgias are female guardian spirits that follow a person as he/she travels through life. The Fylgias are believed to be the spirits of passed ancestors. They remain invisible, waiting to show themselves until they are released from their task at the death-bed of the person whose lifelong companion they have been. When you are alone and have a silent moment to yourself, try to communicate with your Fylgias.

Njørd: A Vanir God, he is the father of Frey and Freya. Njørd represents the fruitfulness of the sea and all that lives in it. He is the patron of seafarers and fishermen and was generally invoked to bring on wealth and harmony. Njørd is also a God of renewal, rebirth and new beginnings. The sea god's temples were by the shore so that he would bless the longships as they set sail. Njørd's health was always toasted to. All animals that live in the sea are his, but he is particularly fond of the swans and the seals. Njørd's symbol is the ship and his tool is the harpoon.

Ran: While Njørd is the God of the fruitful sea, the Goddess Ran represents the great blue when it is raging. Ran's name means "robber" – indeed, "ran" is the Norwegian word for robbery. This Goddess of the sea is said to be cruel and greedy, catching her prey with a huge net and dragging it down into her damp realm. Ran is the Goddess of death for all those who die at sea. The Northern people believed that she entertains the drowned in her coral caves, where couches are spread to receive them and where the mead flows as freely as in Valhalla.

Ran might bear some resemblance to the Lorelei, a water nymph who according to German legend sits by a rock on the shore of the river Rhine. There, she sings the most enchanting melodies whilst combing her golden hair. The men in the boats that pass by could not help steering towards her song and, upon seeing her, they are blinded by her golden hair and crushed against the rock that is her seat. The Lorelei is also believed to drag fishermen down to her coral caves to keep her company.

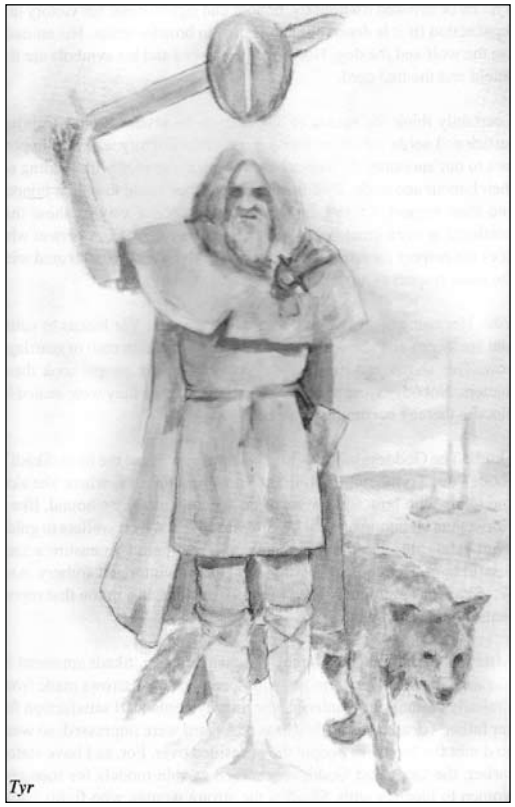
Ran is supposed to have great affection for gold, poetically referred to as "the flame of the sea", because the noble metal is used to illuminate her halls. Ancient seafarers often had some gold with them to win Ran's favour. So that she would not rage, but carry the ships to their desired destination.

Balder: The shining God, Balder is the most beloved son of Odin and Frigga. A handsome youth, he is eternally in the prime of life. He represents light and the warm bright day. Balder is the symbol of kindness, peace, the love of beautiful things, aesthetics and fairness.

I should mention here that love means the true and pure feeling an individual has towards persons and things very dear in his or her life. I strongly believe that particularly the Christians have misused the word "love". The word is thrown around, with no true meaning behind it.

"Jesus loves you" – this love doesn't really make any difference to the individual. Submitting to a vengeful lord in heaven, or turning the other cheek on earth, have nothing to do with love either. You cannot, and definitely should not, love everybody. The feeling of love is sacred and should be warmly felt towards the individuals or things most dear to you, and the words "I love you" should only be said to the ones that have really touched your heart.

The myth of Balder's death symbolises the passing of summer and the absence of the sun during the winter months. The sun returns at Yule and the sun's rebirth is then celebrated. Balder can be invoked for artistic inspiration, kindness, fairness and matters concerning beauty and harmony. His animal is the deer. The oak (with the mistletoe...) is his tree. His rune is Dagaz and his symbols are the sun-disc and the axe.



Tyr

Tyr: Tyr is the God of war, courage and victory. He is the true warrior, who represents strength and devotion to his community – the ideal of the Germanic men. In battle, Tyr's rune Teiwaz was carved or painted on swords and shields to call on the God to ensure victory and bravery. In times of war, ceremonial sword-dances were held in honour of Tyr.

Tyr also represents justice, law and order, the truth and good will. He is the God of contracts and legal matters, and he was the patron of those who would recite the law when the Althing was gathered. Men sealed their oaths in the name of Tyr by swearing on their weapons.

Like Odin, Tyr is a sacrificial God. Yet, compared to Odin, who sacrificed himself to his higher self for gaining personal knowledge, Tyr sacrificed his right hand for the safety of the Gods. Such was seen as the noblest deed.

According to the myths, the great Fenriz wolf had grown so big that he had become a threat to the Æsir. The Gods wanted to bind him, so they had the dwarves manufacture a magical rope which nothing could tear. Then, the Gods took Fenriz to an island to "test his strength" – as they told him. The wolf, suspicious of this rather thin rope, demanded that one of the Gods must lay a hand between his jaws as a sign of good faith. Only then would he agree to have the rope around his neck. It was the brave Tyr who voluntarily stuck his right hand into the wolf's fearsome mouth. Tyr did this, even if he knew full well that the wolf would snap his jaws together the moment he noticed that he had been tricked. Paradoxically it was Tyr, the God of honour and truth, who was thus forced to break his word and suffer for his sacrifice, a sacrifice he made for the safety of his community.

Tyr can be invoked for honesty, honour and rightfulness, for victory in a legal action (if it is deserved) and justice in broader terms. His animals are the wolf and the dog. His tool is the sword and his symbols are the shield and the tied cord.

I certainly think the values of Tyr need to be invoked today to bring

justice and noble values back into our society. Dignity was very important to our ancestors. Individuals were very concerned with holding up their honour and pride. By doing bad deeds they could lose their honour and their respect. I think this is quite an effective way to show that unethical or even cruel behaviour will not be tolerated. A person who does not respect the worth of others, does not deserve to be treated with the same respect as a person who does!

Vår: Her name means "true", "wahr" in German. Vår listens to oaths that are sworn and she will punish those that break an oath or marriage vow. This shows just how seriously the Germanic people took these matters. Nobody swore to an oath lightly, and often they were sealed in blood – thereby becoming unbreakable.

Skadi: The Goddess of the winter and the mistress of the hunt. Skadi's abode is in Trymheim, high in the snowy mountains, where she skis and hunts with bow and arrow, often accompanied by a hound, like a Norwegian elkhound or a husky. She was invoked by travellers to guide them safely through the mountains, and by hunters to ensure a successful hunt. Her consort is Uller, the God of winter and archery. And yet, Skadi has previously been married to Njørd, in a union that represents summer and winter. After the Gods killed her father, the giant Thiassi, Skadi appeared in Asgard. Clad in silvery armour, with spear, bow and arrows made from similarly shimmering material, she angrily demanded satisfaction for her father's death. Just as the Gods of Asgard were impressed, so were no doubt the Northern people they presided over. For, as I have stated earlier, the Gods and Goddesses served as role models for men and women to identify with. Skadi is the strong woman who fights back. She defends her right to avenge her father's death. She also has strong feelings and passions, and like any woman she also wishes for romance. I feel that Skadi is certainly my own patron Goddess.

As I have already discussed, the Northern myths tell of strong and daring women, shield-maidens and huntresses. The huntress is also a common figure in other mythologies, for example Diana and Atalanta in Roman and Greek mythology. The huntress represents the daring young woman who chases her target. I often hear the claim that "women are weak". I think the myths say otherwise.

Women have certainly become weak after having been instructed to appear feeble, and told to be passive and silent for many, many generations. How could they then remember their inner strength? The female body is much more resistant to pain and stress than its male counterpart, and women generally have a much longer life-expectancy. All this because it is the responsibility of women to bring forth the new generation.

While it is true that the male of the human species generally has more physical strength than the female, it certainly does not mean that women are incapable of defending themselves. We human beings, after all, belong to the predators. Looking at female animals, it is easy to see that they are neither weak nor passive. They hunt and they protect their young. In fact, no animal is more dangerous to its enemies than a mother animal protecting her young.

The wolf-pack serves as a prime example. The hierarchy in the pack is not "the males above the females" as we have been told. The wolf-pack is lead by the alpha couple, consisting of the dominating male and the dominating female. Beneath them are male and female wolves – with some female wolves ranking higher than some male wolves. Often it is the alpha female wolf that leads the hunt. Just take a look at your local dogs to witness bitches fighting, and beating, male dogs. Like their canine counterparts, women should remember their primal instincts and learn to fight.

After a slight digression, the subject of wolves bring me back to Skadi. For she lives among the wolves in the mountains and she should be invoked by women wanting to make contact with their wild nature. Being a giantess, clad in fur, Skadi may well represent the primal woman. Her name means "hurt" in the Scandinavian languages. Apart from being invoked for safe wintertime travels and hunting trips, she

can also be called upon to provide revenge. I personally also call upon Skadi to protect the last wolves that are ignorantly killed by the sheep-farmers here in Scandinavia.

Skadi

Eir: One of Frigga's attendants, Eir is the Goddess of medicine. She was invoked by women to teach them the skills of healing wounds and curing diseases. It was usually women who practised medicine in the ancient North.

Loki: The God of mischief, of dishonesty and trickery. Throughout the myths Loki constantly tricks the rest of the Gods and causes all kinds of trouble for them, yet it is interesting to notice that it is him that helps the Gods out of these troubles. He pays the price for the crimes he commits against the Gods and, while he makes up for his ill deeds, he provides the Gods with vital gifts. Thus we see that Loki represents a force that initiates change and resolves difficult situations. Much like real life. In our lives we experience sudden obstacles, personal disasters and other chaotic situations. Yet we often work our way out and find ourselves in a better predicament than before. Loki is this necessary change. He stirs up trouble, alarms the Gods and makes them act. Without Loki, there would be no struggle before reaching your goal – exactly what keeps us alive and makes us grow.

An accurate metaphor for Loki is the uncontrollable fire. The myths of his wrong-doings are often merely a description of a fire and destruction caused by lightning. For example, the myth where Loki cuts off Sif's long golden hair (she is the patron Goddess of cornfields) symbolises destruction of crops by fire. The violent blaze can be destructive, yet in nature, new vegetation grows from the scorched earth.

Loki also represents the fire within us. After the Gods breathed life into the first human couple, it was Loki that made their blood circulate. He is the movable energy that flows through us. Without energy, without movement, we would have nothing to drive us, thus there would never be any change – or anything happening at all, for that matter. We can see how our ancestors understood it when nature got in their way, as it often does in a low-tech agricultural society. They got very angry when lightning took their crops, yet they had to accept such events as a part of life. Even the binding of Loki in the end could merely symbolise an attempt to control the untamed fire.

Those who have studied Loki with Christian eyes have not understood his part in the greater religious scheme. They have therefore considered him to be evil, with some going as far as naming him "the devil of the North". This is totally wrong. The Northern people did not believe in a devil, nor in an evil scapegoat on whom they could blame their sins. It is true that they believed in many different destructive forces, forces that the Gods fought against. However, they understood that without these struggles between the Gods and the forces of chaos, there would be no development.

Another reason why Loki does not represent the devil is that the actual devil of the patriarchal religions isn't really all that bad. The evil one in Christianity merely represents earthly pleasures and our sexual instincts: Things that were cherished in Pagan times, but were demonised by the patriarchal religions. If we look at folklore and stories about the devil, we always see him tempting the good people with life, with pleasure, with sex and with magic (self-realisation). All these things are the birthright of we, the people! The devil tempts us to disobey the great Jehovah – and I must say that I consider disobeying an oppressing tyrant a positive thing. The devil is also known as Lucifer, a name that in fact means the "light-bearer" – the bearer of wisdom. The Christian devil originates from Pagan Gods such as Pan or the "green man", nature Gods with horns and cloves that symbolised fertility and our animalistic desires. These deities are more like the very popular God Frey than Loki.

Loki is a shape-shifter and sex-shifter, and he is believed to be the blood brother of Odin – perhaps Loki is even Odin's shadow-side. Sadly, there are Pagan people that have not yet rid themselves of their Christian attitudes, and therefore consider Loki to be too sinister to deal with. However, a true Pagan should attempt to understand all the Gods, and I think Loki can be invoked for his great wit, for a real challenge and for causing a drastic change in ones own live situation.

Norse mythology tells us of the prophecy of Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods. At Ragnarok, all the worlds will be destroyed, including the world of the Gods. Loki will be freed from his bonds and will lead the giants to battle against the Gods. The great wolf Fenriz will be unleashed. Earthquakes, floods and storms will destroy the earth while the sun and the moon will be devoured by giant wolves.

Ragnarok has been compared to the biblical Apocalypse, the day of judgement when the earth is destroyed. However, there are great differences. Nothing suggests that Ragnarok is a day of final judgement or that a divine punishment is the cause of the destruction. Rather, the myth of Ragnarok is yet another description of nature's continuous cycle. All things must pass for new life to grow. Ragnarok is the end of the existing world, yet life continues. The sons and daughters of the Gods will rise to build a fresh new world, a whole new age. The end is just the new beginning.

The God Vidar, the son of Odin, who will rule the new world, symbolises the imperishable forces of nature and the vast, silent forests of the North. Vidar is called the silent God, for he does not know what awaits him in the new life to come.

This was but a short introduction to the Northern Gods and Goddesses. There is so much more to know and I can only urge the reader to explore the myths further. I recommend the book "The Norsemen – Myths and Legends" by H.A. Guerber, for example. Even though I do not agree with everything he writes, this comprehensive volume definitely has vital and detailed information.

THE NINE WORLDS

The ancient people of the North believed that the roots and branches of the world tree Yggdrasil reach into nine different realms or worlds.

The highest of these nine worlds is Asgard, the home of the Æsir Gods. It is also the home of the Vanir Gods that came to live in Asgard, like Njørd, Frey and Freya. The warriors that fall in battle go to Asgard to join Odin and Freya in their halls of Valhall and Folksvang. It was also believed that faithful husbands and wives were re-united in Frigga's hall Fensalir. On a spiritual level, Asgard may represent higher consciousness, self-realisation and individuality.

Vanaheim is the home of the Vanir Gods, the Gods of fertility, wealth and prosperity. Vanaheim is a pleasant, peaceful place. The cult of the Vanir predates the Æsir. The Vanir appear to be the Gods of the Bronze Age.
On a spiritual level, Vanaheim may represent feeling.

Alfheim, or Lightelfheim, is the home of the elves. Alfheim is an enchanting realm. It is ruled by the Vanir God Frey, the God of lust, joy and fertility. Alfheim is the world of plants and animals. The elves are the guardians of the forests, and sometimes they enter the world of humans and dance through the night and moonbeams. The elves are fascinating entities and the Goddess Freya, Frey's sister, takes great delight in watching them dances.

Muspellheim is the realm of fire, both creative and destructive. It was through Muspellheim and Niflheim, the realm of ice, that the earth as we know it came to be. Muspellheim is ruled by Surt, who will later destroy the Gods at Ragnarok.

Midgard, or middle-earth, is our world, the earth as we know it. It is not possible for us mortals to visit the other worlds, except through astral travels and shamanic journeys. Midgard represents the self, the ordinary being.

Jotunheim is a place of high mountains. The mountain ranges are covered in frost and snow, as this is the home of the frost giants. The giants are said to be dangerous beings, and they surely are the enemies of the Æsir. Jotunheim may represent the mountain regions of Norway – a part of the Norwegian mountains is in fact called Jotunheimen. The rocky home of the frost giants seems to be a depiction of a completely sensible fear of crossing the mountains, especially during the winter period – when the journey would be particularly hazardous. On a spiritual level, Jotunheim appears to represent the forces of chaos and the raw masculine force within the self.

Svartalfheim is the home of the svartalver (black elves), the dwarfs and trolls that live underground and inside the mountains. These creatures guard the treasures of the inner earth, like gold, silver and precious stones. They spend all their time exploring the ground for its treasures, and are excellent craftsmen. They are also, however, very cunning, greedy and treacherous. During daytime these tunnelling people have to stay underground in the dark, because if the rays of the sun hits them they would turn to stone. There is a theory that the black elves could have been human dwarfs that were exploring the mountains in search for gold and silver.

Norwegian folklore tells us of the Huldra folk that lives underground and in the stones. Since folklore gives us a rather negative picture of the Huldra and Mara (women that visit people in their sleep to 'ride' them with bad dreams, thus the name "nightmare"), one could assume that their home is in Svartalfheim. However, folklore as we know it has of

course been influenced by Christianity. And, like so many multi-faceted Pagan personalities, the Huldra and the Mara have both been turned into evil creatures. They are described as very sinister and accused of such things as stealing human infants, tempting lone individuals to have intercourse with them (especially before they are married) and kidnapping young brides to imprison them in their world below or in the mountains.

The word Huldra means "the hidden one" and could refer to hidden desires, particularly sexual desires. Northern mythology describes the Huldra a little more positively, regarding them as charming young women with a healthy sexual appetite. They protect the cows that go freely in the mountains and the Huldra themselves, who are described as very beautiful, have a cow's tail. Considering that the elves in Alfheim were associated with fertility and acted as the guardians of animals, I would suggest that the Huldra belong to Alfheim.

The last two worlds are Niflheim and Hel. There seems to be some disagreement about their location as well as their purpose. I have mentioned above that Niflheim is the opposite of Muspellheim. However Niflheim, being the realm of endless mist and ice, is according to mythology also the realm of the dead, the underworld.

It is understandable why Niflheim appears to be a cold world of ice and mist. The winters in the North are dark and bitterly cold, and there was a good chance of freezing to death or dying of hunger if the food supply ran out. It was the winter, the frost and the snow that the Northern people dreaded the most. This is quite the contrary of the Christian idea of Hell and the Jewish Gehenna, both places of fire because the Middle-Eastern people feared the heat of the destructive sun. While the typical Viking would probably dream about such a place when the January winds froze the marrow in his bones.

On a spiritual level, Niflheim represents uncertainty, the subconscious, the depths of hidden knowledge and things that are not clear – a world of fog. Niflheim symbolises the underworld that shamans visit to seek advice from the dead (or their own subconscious). On some accounts the world of the dead, the world below, is called Hel, like the Goddess of the dead herself. Hel is described as a cold place of ice and fog, a lot like Niflheim. However, I must say that I think this dreadful Hel, apart from symbolising the fear of death during winter, was made a much more sinister place by Snorre, the Christian scribe who wrote down the Edda. To me Snorre's vision of Hel bears too many similarities to the Christian Hell. Apart, of course, from the thermostat setting.

The forerunner of the Goddess Hel was Holda, the friendly Goddess of the earth, the weather and fertility, who lived in a lower world of snow – yet another underworld. Holda is also the guardian of children. The dead children go to her and they can play in her apple garden (see later "Frau Holle" and the Elder tree). We can thus see the connection to Frigga, the mourning mother, whose son Balder was taken by Hel. For Frigga is also the guardian of children. Another forerunner of Hel could be Nehellenia, a Dutch Goddess of fertility and the underworld. She is pictured with a basket of apples (as is Holda) and she is accompanied by a dog, similar to Hel (whose realm is guarded by the dog Garm). The Netherlands and Holland are both references to Holda and Nehellenia. Hel, the grim Goddess who represents the dark, hidden aspect of femininity also has similarities to Freya in her shamanistic and witch-crafty aspect and to Urd, who represents both the past and memory. Unborn souls may therefore also be in Hel.

Considering the many similarities between Holda, Hel and Frigga (the queen of the sky who, as described above, welcomes lovers to her hall Fensalir after their deaths), and considering the fact that the Pagans believed in a cycle, I would say that the world below is very close to Asgard, the highest world. The realms of the dead are no doubt connected. I should point out, though, that this is my personal theory.

Hel - Goddess of the Underworld

Cold, this misty night
A black moon's preparing my mind
Out here, I seek her shrine
I welcome the queen of the lowest world

Into the ice hall
Where mirrors reflect my soul
She's freezing my tears
Taking all fears

Two sides to her face
Her claws pierce or embrace
Enter, with open eyes
You'll see her garden of delight

To the within
Beyond our memory
Falling so deep
Where unborn souls sleep

Hail, to the queen of death
Her shadow walks with you
Remember her kind
And understand life

Invisible mate
Waiting to seal our fate
Watch my strife
Hel, guard my life

Cold, this misty night
A black moon's preparing my mind
Beneath eternal fog
I have seen clear

NORTHERN TRADITIONS AND THE NATURAL LORE

Many ancient Northern Pagan customs have survived through the ages. Although we still practise several of our Pagan ancestors' customs and even a few old magical rituals, many people are sadly not aware that they are doing so. Many of the old Pagan symbols have lost their original meaning, and how many people these days know why a horseshoe, a four-leafed clover or even the poisonous fly agar mushroom, for example, are symbols of good luck?

Fairytales, folk-tales and fables contain much of the Pagan symbolism and often carry coded messages. The fairytale of Little Red Riding Hood has been identified by Erich Fromm to be about a young girl experiencing her first menstruation. Using Pagan symbolism, one can assume that the red hood refers to the red cap which was commonly worn by shamans and wise women of the Nordic and Celtic world.

This red cap showed that the individual who wore it had special gifts. Thus the Church forbade the people to wear hats or capes in red. The red cap is said to represent the Fly Agar mushroom and sometimes this cap even had white spots on it. The Volva's stool, on which she sat during her soul-journeys, was also often red with white spots. Again it represented the mushroom that was ingested by magicians and shamans to aid their visions. The red cap was also associated with supernatural beings. Gnomes, kobolds and even Santa Claus are pictured with a red hat. It was believed that the red cap, also called *Tarnkappe*, could make its wearer invisible. Therefore, it is my belief that Little Red Riding Hood may represent a young girl who indeed was experiencing her first period

and has received special powers because of that pivotal point in her life. Her journey through the woods is a spiritual journey into hidden realms.

The fairytales Sleeping Beauty and Frau Holle, for example, also contain much symbolism derived from Germanic mythology. In Sleeping Beauty, twelve fairies were invited to celebrate the baby-girl. They may symbolise the 13 Norns. It was customary in the ancient North to invite the Norns and Disir to give their blessings to the child. The thirteenth fairy, however, the one that would bring menstruation and sexual maturity as her gift, was not invited.

The much-feared thirteenth fairy came uninvited to the feast. Angrily, she announced that the girl would prick herself on a spindle on her fifteenth birthday and fall into endless sleep. Terrified, the king and queen had all sharp items destroyed. On her fifteenth birthday, the girl discovered a strange tower. Inside, she found an old women spinning. It is interesting to note that both Volvas and magicians were known to reside in towers. The old woman spinning probably symbolises a Norn, spinning Sleeping Beauty's fate. It is her fate, and nature's way, that she will reach sexual maturity. Sleeping Beauty takes the spindle, pricks herself with it and upon seeing the drop of blood, falls into deep sleep. The story shows us that the king and queen should have invited the thirteenth fairy, as she would have come anyway. Menstruation and sexual maturity would have been a blessing if she had been welcomed, not a curse.

Frau Holle symbolises the Goddess Holda, a very ancient Goddess of the North, maybe even the most ancient one of all Gods. As mentioned before, she appears to be the forerunner of both Frigga and Hel. Holda is pictured as a wise old woman, and she carries a spindle for making the threads of fate (as in Sleeping Beauty above). She is the patroness of housewives and families and the guardian of children. Holda controls the weather and causes rain and snow. The apple is sacred to her, and there are many apple trees in her beautiful garden in the underworld.

The fairytale of Frau Holle tells of two maids, one good and helpful, the other ignorant and lazy. The description of them individually jumping into a well, loosing consciousness and thereafter awakening in the beautiful garden of Frau Holle, suggests that the girls made contact to the Goddess in a shamanic journey. The first girl is greatly rewarded by Frau Holle, while her ignorant stepsister is punished. This suggests that the first girl has wandered through Frau Holle's realm with open eyes, willing to give and willing to learn. The second girl came and demanded riches. With such an attitude, the other side will not provide much reward.

Another example might be the German medieval folk-tale The Pied Piper of Hamelin, a tale that appears to be based around Odin's wild hunt. To me, the piper seems to be Odin in disguise. The Pagans believed that Odin would wander amongst men, disguised, to observe and test them. We know several folk-stories telling of people meeting the devil wander amongst us in the guise of an ordinary man. This so-called devil may, in fact, well be the demonised Odin.

After Christianity was introduced to Northern Europe, many ancient tales became more and more influenced by Christian thinking. Thus, they were retold in a different manner by people who could not understand the former Pagan thinking. Some people even deliberately demonised the characters of the tales to frighten their children into being good little Christians. The ancient Gods, the mysterious entities of the mythology, and even the Pagan people themselves were now re-interpreted as big bad wolves, demons or giants with a taste for children.

Many of the tales and songs of folklore that we know today are in fact Pagan in origin, yet they have been rewritten by the early Christians. Themes like barbarous Pagans tempting a good Christian to sin became very popular. For example, there is a Norwegian song called *Lita Karin*. It deals with a God-fearing girl who refuses to marry a terrible Pagan king. This king executes her and after her death she flies to heaven in the form of a dove. This song is typical of the propaganda of its time.

Despite the new religious influence, names from the ancient days have survived through the ages. There are many places, lakes, mountains and plants that still bear the meaningful names our Pagan ancestors gave to them.

Even our weekdays are still named after our Gods of the North. Monday is Mani's day, the day dedicated to the moon. Tuesday is Tyr's day, the day of the God Tyr, the God of justice. Wednesday is Wodan's day, the day of the God Wodan (whose name can also be spelled Wotan or Odin). Thursday is the day of the thunder God Thor. Friday is Freya's day, named after the Goddess of the same name. Saturday has been renamed in English, and has become the day of the roman God Saturn. In Norway this day is still called Lørdag or Laugardag, and in the old days this was a day for washing, bathing, sport and entertainment. Sunday is Sol's day, the day of the sun. In Norwegian the Gods' names in the weekdays are more obvious. Mandag, Tirsdag, Onsdag (Odinsdag), Torsdag, Fredag, Lørdag, Søndag. In Germany the Wednesday has been changed into Mittwoch, meaning "the middle of the week". Saturday is called Sonnabend, meaning Sunday's eve.

Likewise, in Southern Europe the weekdays are named after their roman Gods and their physical manifestations, the planets.

The Northern peoples also had their own calendar. There are small variations and the different nations had individual names for the months. The months in modern practice are called: Snowmoon for January, Horning for February, Lent for March, Ostara for April, Merrymoon for May, Fallow for June, Haymoon for July, Harvest for August, Shedding for September, Hunting for October, Fogmoon for November, Wolfmoon or Yule month for December.

When the Pagans refused to give up their most popular festivals, the Church saw no other alternative than to Christianise the already existing rites. The celebration of Yule, originally a fest saluting the sun's return, was changed to Christmas. But still today, people of Northern European origin celebrate the birth of Christ with obvious Nordic Pagan symbols. Christmas in other countries is very different from ours. The Spaniards, for example, celebrate the Christianised version of a Pagan festival originally dedicated to the old Roman God Saturn. Christian countries all over the world celebrate the festivals of their Pagan ancestors, at their appropriate time and in their natural environment. Sadly, they are performed in the name of an alien religion. I would like to ask anyone to study the rites of the old religion in their native country and then compare them to the modern religious festivals practised today. You might find that the same festivals that are celebrated today in the name of Christianity, or some other Middle-Eastern religion, were once dedicated to nature and the Gods of your ancestors. Keep the festivals alive, but please celebrate them in their original form and honour the natural forces they originally were dedicated to.

THE MAIN SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

Yule is the celebration of the return of the sun. December 21st, also called Midwinter or Winter Solstice, is the shortest day of the year, flanked by its longest and darkest nights. The sun has completed its circle in the heavens, and is now turning towards us again. From now on the days will gradually become longer. Yule is a whole period, lasting 12 days from December 20th to the 31st, and this is a time of hope and new beginnings. The Yuletide is an important time for the family. The care and commitment we show towards our loved ones during this period has always been a custom of the Germanic peoples. It is a reminder of how much we need and appreciate our family and friends during the long cold winter months.

As mentioned above, the Christ-mass as celebrated today still retains many Pagan customs. Obvious Nordic symbols, like the old man in red clothing, a sledge pulled by reindeer, the pine decorated with glass globes – all to celebrate a man from the sunny Middle East? Hardly. Christ was allegedly born around the Winter-Solstice, the night when the sun is reborn to the nations of the Northern lands. Indeed, Christmas is still called Yule in Scandinavia. The Germans call the

celebration Weihnachten, meaning “the night made sacred”.

It is often claimed that modern Christmas traditions were created sometime during the 18th century. If Santa Claus really is a modern figure, why did figures and symbols that were known to our Pagan ancestors suddenly become popular again after so long a time? To me, Santa Claus and the traditions surrounding him proves that the ways of our ancestors are still within us. The people that resurrected traditions that were known to the Pagans must have remembered them from within. Santa is just a modern version of a figure from the ancient North. Likewise, the Christmas tree has always been a symbol of illumination to our ancestors, the reborn light and eternal life. Dancing around the lighted tree to hail the returning light is a very Pagan custom indeed. The traditional Christmas cake or bread with raisins or the British Christmas pudding represents Jord, Mother Earth.

You may want to decorate your own Yule tree with sun-wheels and the sun-rune, and perhaps suns and moons.

A Blot would be appropriate on Winter-Solstice night, and a sun-wheel should be burned. A red candle should be lit at sunset for each of the 12 Yule days. On the night of the 24th of December, a Yule log should be lit in the fireplace as a symbol of the returning warmth of the sun. The log can be decorated with greenery, cones or fruits before it is burned, but take care: The log should not burn out entirely. A piece of it should be kept in your house, and should be burnt with next year’s Yule log.

Yule is also a time to give special treatment to both pets and farm-animals, as well as your stranger companions. According to Norwegian folklore, the “Nisse” (the Norwegian word for Santa) is a kobold creature who lives in the stable. It is an old Yule custom to leave a bowl of porridge there for him. The Nisse would be very insulted if he was ignored, and he would no longer do his job of protecting the animals. He might even begin to tease the people of the household if he was cheated of his Yuletide treat.

There are many more customs practised, especially ones that deal with food, games and rites. These traditions often vary a little from region to region. However, the most important aspect of them all is to hail the returning sun and appreciate the company of your family in the darkest nights.

Disting or Imbolc (around February 14th) is a celebration of the new light that begins to manifest. A candle should be lit.

Easter or Spring Equinox (March 21st) is the celebration of the manifestation of the sun and the new life that spring brings. Night and day are now equally long, and the hens begin to lay eggs. Thus the egg is a symbol of fertility and the beginning of new life. Ancient farmers used the first egg of the year as a sacrificial offering. Painted eggs can be offered as a sacrifice at the Easter ceremony. The eggs may be painted in red, with fertility runes or circles to represent the circle of life. An egg can be hung on the inside of the window to protect the house. Alternatively, you can hang it in the bedroom, decorated with fertility symbols. Collect a few branches and bring them into the house, and hang some colourfully painted eggs on them to give your home the feeling of spring.

This is a time both for spring cleaning around the house and cleansing on a more spiritual level. An awakening from the winter period gives vital energy, so a cleansing bath on the vernal equinox is appropriate. The name Easter comes from the Goddess Eastre or Ostara, the Goddess of spring. The Church took over that name and the traditions to go with it; yet, as they claimed that the time coincided with the resurrection of Jesus, Easter became another major Christian festival. As with Yule, people don’t seem to wonder about the somewhat strange connection between coloured eggs, the Easter bunny (an old symbol of fertility) and Jesus.

In Germany, it is still common to have great Easter fires, on which the Yule trees from the previous winter are burnt. It is obvious that this too is a Pagan custom, symbolising that the dark period is finally over.

May Day is a bright and joyful celebration. Trees and bushes become greener and greener. Flowers start to blossom, the days become warmer and there is a sweet smell in the mild air. Both humans and animals are overcome by the giddiness of spring. On May Day, the people of the community gather to drink, sing and dance in merriment. Traditionally, May-poles are erected and children dance around them. In England, you can still watch Morris-dancers perform fertility dances on this day. May is welcomed on the night before May 1st, and it is still a custom in Germany to "dance into the May". This night is called Walpurgisnacht, and is also the traditional night of the witches, who would dance around a bonfire on the Blocksberg (this hill does indeed exist in Germany). The first of May is a day to remember the bright side of life.

Summer Solstice or Midsummer (June 21st) is the celebration of the final victory of the sun, and the full manifestation of the vital forces that were born when the sun turned at Yule. The sun is at its highest point, making Midsummer the longest day of the year. The flowers stand in full blossom and it is believed that the plants are magically charged at Midsummer night, so this is the best time to gather herbs.

Midsummer is a time to heal and a time for lovers. Love potions should be made and love-spells should be cast. Girls put flowers and herbs under their pillow, hoping to catch a glimpse of their future partner in their dreams. In the old days, a sun wheel or a great ball of hay was torched and rolled down a hill to represent the great ball of fire, the sun. People gather around a bonfire that would burn through the entire night. The Church changed this day to St. John's day. The Church allowed the bonfires to be lit, as long as they were not in honour of the sun. But collecting herbs for potions was frowned upon.

Althing (around August) is a time of great regional gatherings and fairs. Social, legal and business matters are discussed and a Blot is performed. This is the time to reap what one has sown.

Harvest or Autumnal Equinox happens on September 23rd. Day and night are of equal length now. The next day will be shorter, and we are reminded that the dark period draws nearer.

Winternight (around October 15th) is a time for turning your attention towards inner concerns. The ground is covered in leaves, and nature will soon die its annual death. This is the period of the year where many people drift towards a more depressive frame of mind, and surely it is easy to feel as withered as the landscape outside. Winter is near, a long period of lifeless darkness lies ahead – but, as always, the circle of life continues. A Blot in honour of the shadowy aspects of the Gods could be performed.

It would be fair to say that the days of celebration from Yule to Winternight not only highlight events in nature's cycle, but also the events in an individual's life – with its ups and downs.

The ancient Celtic festival **Samhain** is still celebrated in English speaking countries, though under the Christian name of Halloween or All Hallow's Eve, on the 31st of October. Samhain is a time to remember the dead and a time of divination. It is the night when the doors between our world and the underworld are wide open. The dead have the chance to return to our world and communicate with us. On this day, Pagan people would wear masks or paint their faces, so that no difference could be seen between the living and the dead. The Germanic people had a similar celebration in November called Einheriar's day, where the warriors of the tribe would wear masks and painted faces to imitate the Einheriar, the fallen warriors who had joined Odin in Valhalla.

Samhain and Walpurgisnacht, the night of the witches (which may well have been originally dedicated to Freya) are nights when the mysterious sides of life manifest themselves. The period between these two occasions is exactly six months. Both nights are ideal nights for shamanic practice and divination.

Solstice past

Crimson summer sky
sundown has come
trees cloaked in Shadows
what would I find beyond?
As I'm watching, thinking, waiting for the night to fall
could I only turn the time
could I stop this moment

Grey summer sky,
the trees swing softly
come summer rain
and kiss my skin
tears in my eyes mingle with the raindrops
warm winds blow my face dry
yet, still I cannot see

From the woods I hear my name
passions of summer time
I follow the whisper
enthralled by the magic
Tell me secrets
the life-blood of nature
but underneath the green moss
their traces disappeared

Oh, what I see, what I feel
Oh, could it be a memory?
or is it mere fantasy?
Hide away the pain,
when no words could ever explain

Midsummer night
bewitched by the light
at solstice fires
the wheel burns bright
Join the dance, celebrate the peak of life
Cast away the reality that
the fall has began.

Summer will pass
but the sun shall return
summer nights will be
but how many more to see?
While I'm watching, breathing
taken by the summer air
The vision may still be
the moment's gone forever.

THE BLOT

The religious rites performed in the Northern tradition to honour a God or Goddess, or to celebrate the seasons and a special occasion, were called *Blot*. As the name suggests, blood was often sacrificed at the Blot in ancient times. Before the ceremony, cattle would be slaughtered and prepared for the feast after the Blot. The blood would be poured into a bowl and, during the Blot, sprinkled over images of the Gods and onto the ground. Blood is the life force. Since the dawn of time, blood has been worshipped and sacrificed in ceremonies. It was quite common in ancient cultures to drink blood, often the blood of slain wild animals, since it was often believed that the blood would give strength and energy. Please note that the reader should not try this at home, as it can lead to several interesting diseases.

To give or to mix drops of one's own blood had a very strong symbolic meaning. An oath sworn by blood meant that the oath was to be taken very seriously. To sacrifice blood and staining the earth with this life-force symbolised the returning of life to Mother Earth, so that she could continue to bring forth life. The intent of the blood rituals was to show respect to the Gods and Goddesses, the natural forces, to the community and to ensure that life would continue.

Our ancestors had a sacred area set aside for religious purposes. This place was called the *hov*. The rites were usually conducted outdoors and the ceremony was led by the Godi and Gydja – the priest and the priestess of the Northern tradition. Naturally, there are variations to a Blot. It can involve the whole community or just a single family, and the Blot can also be performed by a lone individual.

You'll need a sprig of evergreen, a drinking-horn, a wooden bowl, mead, ale or milk with honey (this was commonly given in Alve-Blots) and the offerings to be given. The chosen items should be placed on a flat stone or tree-stump in the forest, or laid on fur or a particular cloth that you brought along for the occasion. A fire can be made (check with the law first).

The first thing you do is to perform a banishing. This can be done by drawing Thor's hammer in the air, facing all four directions, starting in the North. Then the ground, on which the ritual is performed, is charged and made sacred with a poem, speech or song. At this point, the other participants may enter the charged ground and stand in a circle. The intent of the rite is stated. Torches are lit, one placed in each of the four directions dedicated to the guardians of that quarter. This is one suggestion. A variation would be to place torches around the circle, one for each deity called upon. Next, you give a speech to the deity that is to be honoured or about the reason for celebrating this particular Blot. To read a bit from the Edda or a story from the myths is a good suggestion.

The mead, or other drink that you are using, is poured into the horn and charged with divine power. All participants drink from the horn, toasting the deities or voicing their wishes. The horn is never drained. The rest of the beverage in the horn is poured into the wooden blessing bowl. The sprig of evergreen is now dipped into the bowl and the liquid is sprinkled onto the ritual ground, into the fire and around all participants. Offerings like corn, bread, eggs or beer, can be given to the elements. Personal gifts, talismans and magical sigils can also be given to the forces or to a particular God or Goddess. Also herbs, powders, oil or – most powerful – your own blood.

Magical practice is a part of Pagan religious rites. Depending on the nature of the rite, chants can be sung, the congregation can dance around the fire-place, a spell can be spoken and runes can be cast – or a full-fledged Seidr session performed. Or all this can be done after the actual Blot.

At the end of the Blot, the contents of the blessing bowl are poured onto the bare ground and its power is thus returned to nature. The Blot is ended by announcing the end of the rite, facing the four directions in turn, with the last one being the North. Be sure to wish the Gods, elves and other forces farewell. A more simple variant would be to make the sign of the hammer.

After the rite of the Blot is finished, it can be followed by the *Gilde*, the merry feast.

CELEBRATING PERSONAL EVENTS

Naming-day: This is a ceremony to welcome the newborn baby into the family and announce its name. On this occasion, the father of the baby takes the child onto his lap (In Norway this ceremony was known as *Knesetting*, meaning "to sit on the lap") and gives his blessings to the child, speaking of all the good qualities he wishes for the child to have. He passes the child to the mother who voices her own wishes. The parents then pass the child to the guests, who stand in a circle or sit around the table in the family's home, each one holding the child and welcoming it, wishing it luck. After the ceremony there should be a feast, with song and dance and many toasts and blessings to the little infant. Gifts are given, and in Norway it is still a tradition to present the child with a spoon or cup of silver. The Norns and Disir should be invited to give the child their blessing and protection and ensure it a good fortune.

The name of your child should be selected carefully. Of course it is important that the name sounds nice, however, the meaning of the name is just as crucial. In old times a child would always be given a name with a meaning. The name was usually not given immediately after birth. The parents took their time observing the child choosing a name that describes the child's nature and also a virtue its parents wished for the child to have. Often, the child would also receive the name of its grandmother or grandfather, so that their spirit would be passed on to the new generation.

Here are some examples of proper Nordic names for boys: Alv – meaning elf, Arnar – eagle, Asgeir – divine spear, Askur – the Ash tree (also the name of the first man), Bert – light (or shining), Bjørn – bear, Brage – the highest, Dag – day, Einar – the lone warrior, Eirik – the almighty ruler, Eldar – the fire warrior, Frode – clever, Gard – defender, Grim – man with helm or mask (a by-name of Odin), Hauk – hawk, Håkon – warrior and son, Jarl – earl, Leiv – the heir, Norbert – Northern light, Ragnar – adviser and warrior, Ravn – raven, Rolv – honour and wolf, Rune – rune (also meaning "the secret"), Sigurd – conqueror and defender, Sigve – victory and tree, Stig – wanderer, Tor – thunder, Torgrim – the helm of Tor, Trygve – the trustworthy, Ulv – wolf, Unnvald – the beloved ruler, Vetle – born in winter.

And a list of names for girls: Aila – from Helga meaning the holy, Alva – the she-elf, Disa – the Dise, Edda – the ancient one, Eira – the healer or the healing Goddess, Eldfrid – beautiful fire, Embla – the elm tree (also the name of the first woman, Askur's partner), Erla – the noble, Freya – the lady (and, of course, the Goddess Freya), Frigga – the loved one (or the Goddess of the same name), Gunilla – the battle-maiden, Gyrid – Godly and beautiful, Helvig – healthy and headstrong, Hilda – the fighter or the warrior, Hulda – devotion, Irmelin – the strong and mild, Isrid – beautiful ice, Liv – protection, Magna – strength, Norunn – the one that has the North in her heart, Ragna – advice, Runa – the rune (like with the boy's version of the name, this also means "the secret"), Sigrunn – victory and secret, Sol – sun (or the sun-Goddess), Tora – thunder, Ulva – the she-wolf, Unndis – grace and Dise, Urda – fate, Valdis – the chosen Dise, Vilrunn – will and secret.

I decided to name my own daughter Alva, and the name suits her perfectly. She is a special, enchanting little girl, who always manages to fascinate the people around her.

It was customary amongst the Northern peoples to celebrate the child having cut its first tooth. On this occasion a tooth-gift was given to the child. The Æsir gave the God Frey Alfheim, the fairyland, as his tooth-gift. A child can also make a wish every time it looses one of its baby teeth. The tooth fairy will then come during the night to exchange the tooth with a little present for the child. It is a nice tradition to keep these teeth and a lock of the child's hair in a neat little container.

Reaching adulthood: This celebration marks the passage from child to adult, the youth's initiation into manhood or womanhood. The rite, which was celebrated by all Pagan societies, was obviously a very significant and exciting event for the youth. This new stage in his or

her life brought more freedom, but also more responsibility. Part of the celebration was the recognition of the youth's sexual maturity. He or she was first separated from members of the opposite sex. The soon-to-be man or woman was then taken on a trip into nature, to a cabin or on a fishing-trip, for example. The mother and other women join the girl; and the father and other men join the boy. A ceremony would then be performed to initiate the young girl or boy into the circle of women or men. Stories of wisdom suitable for the occasion would be told and good advice given. A valuable, meaningful gift would be given to the youth, for example a dagger or a piece of jewellery.

This rite of reaching adulthood was often celebrated for a young girl to coincide with her first menstruation. She was becoming a woman now, and was therefore introduced to the mysteries of womanhood. In ancient societies a girl's first period was often celebrated by the entire community.

The menstrual cycle corresponds with the cycle of the moon, and this led to the belief that a menstruating woman held special magical powers. The patriarchal religions, on the other hand look upon menstruation as something unclean. Women are still embarrassed about their menstruation.

To a girl who has recently experienced her first menstruation, I think it would be ideal to give a silver ring with a red stone or arm-ring to symbolise her menstrual cycle and thus the cycle of the moon. Should the girl still be very young and it does not seem right for the parents to officially celebrate the rite of reaching adulthood, it can be celebrated later. There should, however, still be a little private celebration of the girl's first period and the ring given to her because this event is very special. She may be very embarrassed, but it should be made into a joyous and a positive experience.

The rite of reaching adulthood might be suitable to celebrate for a boy when his voice starts to break. If the boy is too young to have his maturity celebrated, you can always have a big celebration later. However, as with the young girl, the occasion should be privately acknowledged as a positive thing. And, like the girl, the boy may be embarrassed by what has happened to him.

The most suitable time to include relatives and friends in the celebration of reaching adulthood might be around the age of fourteen or fifteen. This might also be appropriate since many of their peers have their Christian confirmation around this age.

In Pagan times, when the youth returned home on the day after the initiation into manhood or womanhood, he or she was welcomed by the rest of the clan or family. A party would be held for the youth with plenty of guests and presents. Having celebrated the rite of reaching adulthood, it is important to remember to treat the youth like a growing adult and give him or her more freedom.

Engagement: On this occasion, a man and a woman made a commitment to each other and pledged to be wed to each other within a year and a day. This occasion was also called hand-fasting and, as the name suggests, the man and the woman each had a hand tied to another with a rope to symbolise their bond. If you are celebrating this custom, it would be appropriate to honour Vår, the Goddess who is present when oaths are sworn.

Wedding: The most popular time for weddings was around Midsummer. The bride would wear a gown in red, the colour of passion, love and the favourite colour of the God Thor. I consider it to be inappropriate for the bride to wear white, as a white wedding dress was introduced by the Church to symbolise her innocence (i.e. her virginity) and the veil over her face symbolises her submission.

The Pagan bride also wore a circlet of corn on her head and red ribbons in her hair. She held a bouquet of flowers in her hands. The groom could also wear some clothing in red. As it is today, the young couple was generally accompanied by a best woman and a best man, with the best man wearing the groom's sword.

Detailed descriptions of ancient wedding ceremonies are, as far as I know, not in existence. Still, we have some clues as to what was going on. The Goddess Vår was invited to witness the vows taken by the man and the woman. Some sources speak of an iron ring that the couple held on to. This ring was then heated over a fire and burnt into a piece of wood to symbolise the union in marriage. After the couple was wed, they were showered with wheat or corn for a fertile future. This tradition has survived, as we still shower newly married couples with rice or confetti. After the ceremony, the couple would jump side by side over a branch or a stretch of rope to signify that they were entering a new phase in their lives, and that they were facing the future together. Traditionally, the bride would be given a dagger at her wedding and the keys to all the doors of the household. She was now the mistress of the house.

The marriage was intended to last for a lifetime, with love, honesty and respect for each other. However, if these expectations were not met it was possible to demand a divorce. Such an option is essential in a society where a person's dignity is respected and quality of life matters.

Funeral: In ancient times, the dead were buried within a grave-hill or burnt on a funeral pyre. Personal belongings, gifts, food, mead and sometimes even whole ships were buried or burnt with the deceased. Anything that they might need on their way to the next world was placed with them in the grave.

With the coming of Christianity, our dead get buried according to Christian tradition in cemeteries. In many European countries, this is the only option that is open. Check out the law in your own country. If a Pagan funeral ceremony is not possible, it can be an alternative to hire a speaker from the local humane-ethic or atheist organisation instead of the vicar for a more neutral, non-religious funeral. And nobody can stop you from wishing the dead farewell in a Pagan manner afterwards. If your departed family member has to be buried in grounds consecrated by the Church, try to ask for a natural grey gravestone without any Christian symbols. Request to have a Pagan symbol or runes engraved on the stone, alternatively a poem with a Pagan theme. It might be an idea for the heartfelt Heathen to request a Pagan funeral in his or her will.

I once saw a documentary on Norwegian television about a group of people in England who had bought some land in the woods to use as a burial ground. The idea was that people could bury their dead there the way they wish to and to return them to nature. I think that this would be ideal, and we definitely must try to make such an option available in other countries. I also think it would be in keeping with the Pagan virtues to carry the ashes of the dead far into a forest or to the top of a hill – and then scatter the ashes out in all four directions.

In order to be able to celebrate the above occasions with a proper ceremony led by a Godi or a Gydja, I recommend you to get in touch with your nearest Pagan community. Keep in mind, however, that our ancestors did not write down any detailed rituals. Therefore, I think it is appropriate to give each ceremony your own personal touch.

Sadly, Church ceremonies are the only ones available when the present public are to celebrate the highlights of their lives. This is the reason why so many people choose to have their children baptised, have confirmation, get married in the Church and have a vicar lead their funerals. These people are not necessarily very Christian, they just like the spiritual celebration. We all need ceremonies, and I think it is important to spread the word that Pagan celebrations can be a good alternative to the ceremonies of the Church. I am sure that spiritual ceremonies that are full of both meaning and beauty would in time attract many people. What can beat a wedding in the woods, on top of a hill or by the sea?

You might, of course, prefer to celebrate the high points of your life in private, only with your closest family or perhaps just with your beloved or your child. This may to you even be more true and meaningful.

THE MAGIC OF TREES

To our Pagan ancestors, the trees were sacred. Trees were looked upon as mighty living entities that had a lot of wisdom to pass on. Many ancient cultures believed in a world tree, whose branches and roots leads into all the worlds, from the underworld to the highest realms, or to the different planes of consciousness. Human beings have always had a relationship with trees and have even believed them to be their ancestors. In Northern mythology, the first human couple, Ask and Embla, were created from two trunks. It was also a custom in England that the couple to be married should plant two oaks side by side. I think it is very important to revive customs like this one, to help us get back in touch with nature. Planting a tree binds you to your native land, and you will never forget your roots. It was also a tradition to plant a tree after a child was born and to bury the placenta under the tree, thus giving the child a wooden guardian.

Trees were believed to be inhabited by spirits. People would touch the trees for good luck, thus the expression "touch wood" was coined. Yet, as night falls, trees can easily turn into threatening living shadows, allowing the imagination to run wild. Especially deformed trees, called "skeleton trees", have always frightened people, making them believe the tree to be haunted by ghosts.

Pagan villages often had a central tree that was believed to have divine qualities and therefore deserving of worship. When clerics came to the village to convert the community, and saw the villagers worship a tree, they would cut it down, attempting to eliminate the old wisdom. This is what my song "When the Trees were Silenced" from my first album is about. I think this act clearly shows the same mentality that modern man displays today, as he just chops down vast amounts of great trees without a second thought and certainly no feeling of respect. As I will show later, to cut down a tree unwisely was in earlier times always considered to be unlucky for the cutter. Indeed, the man who dared to cut down a sacred tree, like a venerable oak growing on a sacred hill, would be punished for his sacrilege.

The woods give us peace and tranquillity, they regenerate us. Trees help us breathe, give us shelter and provide us with medicines and tools. The great old trees are rooted deep down in Mother Earth and stand as true witnesses of time. Would their stories confirm what the history books tells us?

Each type of tree was believed to have its own physical and magical qualities.

Apple: The apple tree carries the sacred fruit, a symbol of fertility, life and youthfulness. Northern mythology tells of the golden apples that grow in the garden of Iduna, the Goddess of eternal youth, from which all the Gods and Goddesses in Asgard eat in order to keep their youthful appearance. Even today we know the expression "an apple a day..."

I think the secret of the apple is that its seeds strengthen our immune system. Apple seeds are, however, poisonous in very large doses. Thus the trick is to eat a whole apple a day – including its stones. The apple is a symbol of love and was thus used for love-magic to attract a lover and to keep love growing. Cider was regarded as a potent drink, and the apple tree was said to never be struck by lightning.

Ash (fraxinus exceelsior): The ash tree is very important in the Northern tradition. The world tree Yggdrasil is an ash. The first human male was created out of an ash tree. Odin's spear, Gungnir, is cut from an ash and it was believed that cutting wood from an ash tree without an appropriate reason would bring bad luck. Wood from the ash was used

for divination and for making charms, thus this is the perfect material for carving runes and making magical staves.

As the ash is considered a masculine tree, its wood is particularly suitable for men. The ash is a protective tree and it was used to protect from those that wished you ill. A wand or staff of ash was believed to ward off snakes as well. The smoke of ash wood is a benevolent and pleasant incense. The leaves from the tree are also thought to bring luck.

Aspen (populus tremula): The wood of the aspen tree is useful for making shields, and this naturally also includes magical shields. The aspen is known as the shivering tree, and in German and Norwegian the expression "to shiver like aspen leaves" describes a person that shivers from cold, fever or fright. In folklore, aspen is believed to have the power to cure shivers by "taking in the person's illness". The tree will then shiver instead of the sick person.

Bay (laurus nobilis): Bay is a tree of preservation and, like the apple tree, it is believed to never be struck by lightning. Put a leaf under the pillow at night, it will bring you pleasant (and informative) dreams.

Beech (fagus sylvaticas): The wood of the beech has been used for making writing tablets. The tree is thus associated with gaining knowledge.

Birch (betula pendula): Birch is the sacred tree of fertility, birth, children, renewal and purification dedicated to the mother Goddess Frigga. A birch tree was used for the may pole, and birch branches scattered in or around the house kept malevolent influences away. Birch twigs have also been used to punish wrongdoers, in order to beat the negative energies out of them. In springtime, at the Blot, all individuals were symbolically beaten to drive out the winter and to awaken the feelings of spring – fertility and joy of life. Druids also initiated their pupils with a birch twig. At Yuletide, the birch log was stripped of its white bark and burnt as the Yule log. Birch wood was used to make cradles with, partly because it is good and hard wood, but also for protecting the infant. Its rune is Berkana.

Blackthorn (prunus spinosa): Blackthorn was believed to have powers of magical defence against all kinds of psychic harm. Its fruits were treasured in prehistoric times, and a drink made from nine pieces of it was believed to make the eyes beautiful. Protective staves, sticks and talismans can be made from the wood.

Elder (sambucus nigra): The elder is a very useful medicine plant against colds and the flu. It was especially used to help children make a quick recovery from illness. Elder was therefore planted near the house, where it would keep the home harmonious and ensure the well being of children. The elder is dedicated to Holda, who took care of children; its German name Hollunder suggests the reference to the Goddess or, as has been mentioned before, Frau Holle. This gives the elder tree a connection to the underworld.

Elder twigs worn as a garland around the head on May Eve (Walpurgisnacht, the night of the witches), was believed to enable the wearer to see supernatural beings. Thus this could be very useful to wear in a shamanic ritual on this night and Samhain, when the doors to the other side would be wide open. Whistles made from elder were believed to have a magical function, and could be used to summon spirits. Elder twigs were hung in front of stables to ward off both harmful spirits and lightning, and would ensure fertility and vigour in the livestock. However, neither man nor beast should be struck with an elder twig, as this would bring bad luck.

It was also considered unlucky to burn elder wood. Only young lovers with pure hearts, widows and children could burn such wood without fearing any bad luck. This again shows us that the lady of death guards the young, innocent and mourning, similarly to the Goddess Frigga. I know of a Swedish song, which translated goes "Come and dance, come and sing all you children in the whole land, Hel-Frigga", again illustrating the connection between the two Goddesses.

Elm (ulmus spp.): The elm is another important tree to the Northern faith, since the first human female is said to have been created from a log of it. The elm is a symbol of the last phase in life, the mysteries of death and the passing into a new form of life. The elm tree represents the death aspect of the Earth Mother, and the wood has traditionally been used to make coffins.

Hawthorn (cratægus spp.): A bush sacred to Thor, the thunder God. It would be planted as a hedge around sacred places as a physical barrier and shield. If you were to sit under a hawthorn bush on May Day, Midsummer's day or Samhain it was believed that you would then run the risk of being enchanted or "fetched away by spirits". A twig of hawthorn served as protection, but had to be gathered by a person other than the user. It was therefore a perfect gift. Its rune may be Thurisaz, the thorn. All bushes with thorns generally correspond to this rune.

Hazel (corylus avellana): Hazel is the tree of wisdom. It is associated with divination, and was believed to be especially suitable for dowsing due to its forked twigs. Its wood has been used for the purpose of divination, especially by wise women. A wand of hazel wood was said to guarantee the carrier a fair hearing in difficult circumstances and a similar staff was used by the Druids as a symbol of authority. A fence of hazel staves that were linked together by ropes surrounded the open-air courts of Northern societies. This boundary was known as the *vedbond*, meaning "wood-bounding", and presented a magical as well as a physical barrier. Hazel trees are also believed to ward off dangerous forces and were often planted near the house. Hazel nuts have always been a symbol of fertility, immortality and wisdom.

Holly (ilex aquifolium): A holly blossom fixed to the door handle or sill was believed to act as magical protection against enemies entering the house. Holly is especially associated with Yule. In Britain it is a favourite decoration in the house and on the Yule pudding.

Ivy (hedera helix): The ivy is said to strangle the trees on which it grows, and it is therefore associated with death. Ivy vines were believed to resemble the great serpent that gnaws endlessly on the roots of the world ash Yggdrasil. Yet, the ivy is an evergreen, keeping its leaves throughout winter, which gives the ivy a more balanced significance of both death and new life. It is thus also connected to Yuletide, the time of death and rebirth. When it grows on the walls of a house, ivy is said to guard the inhabitants from psychic attack.

Juniper (juniperus communis): A tree believed to keep all harm away. Branches of juniper were therefore often placed into the foundation of a house. Juniper wood makes a powerful incense that drives away negative energies or spirits, and may be burned prior to a magical ceremony. Juniper was also believed to protect against snakes, mosquitoes "and other pests" and its essential oil burned or a few drops smeared onto the skin (diluted, of course – essential oils must always be diluted with carrier oils, i.e. almond oil) is an effective insect-repellent.

Linden (tilia platyphyllos): In the societies of our forebears, linden was regarded as the tree of love and good luck. Not surprisingly, it was dedicated to Freya. The Germanic name Lindi means "soft" and "mild". Alleys of linden marked, and still mark, a once important or even sacred road. The linden was also regarded as the tree of justice (the court-linden is still known today) and since verdicts have been known to be announced under the linden tree, it became known as the tree of destiny. A linden tree marks an important point in the town or village, like the market place or the town hall. A tea from linden flowers is a tasty, soothing and harmonising drink.

Maple (acer campestre): The maple is a symbol of a long life (even though it is, ironically, not a long-lived tree). To ensure long life for a young child, it was customary in Northern Europe to pass it through the branches of a maple tree.

Mistletoe (viscum album): Mistletoe is not actually a tree, as it grows on the branches of other trees, notably on the sacred apple or oak. The mistletoe has always been regarded as a magical plant and used for magical purposes since the dawn of civilisation.

Mistletoe is a sacramental plant in the Druidic tradition. This is because the white berries symbolise the droplets of semen of the sky God, and it was ceremonially cut and collected into a white cloth. Growing on an apple tree, the plant was believed to bring fertility and good luck to young women.

Mistletoe has always been used to cure infertility in male humans and animals. Mistletoe is still hung in the house as decoration at Yule, and it is still a Yule custom in Britain to kiss under the mistletoe. Due to its importance in the Druidic tradition, the Britons prohibited the use of mistletoe for church decorations. Mistletoe growing on oak is said to be especially powerful and can be used for various magical purposes. As mentioned before, a dart of mistletoe killed the sun god Balder, whom nothing else could harm.

Oak (quercus robur): All over Europe, the oak was regarded as both mighty (little wonder, as it can last for 900 years) and holy. The tree is associated with strength and protection and is dedicated to the sky father. The acorn, the fruit of the oak, is a sacred symbol of potency. As a result, the tree became a favoured symbol of kings. Because of its association with strength and protection, doors were made from oak – as were the shields of warriors. Because of its structural strength, oak timber was favoured for heavy construction such as framing buildings and building ships. In Pagan times, oaks were considered to often grow in sacred places of power. To take an axe to such a tree was a grave offence.

Unlike apple and bay trees, the oak tree was believed to be a prime target for lightning. This connects them to the divine power of Thor and the tree struck by lightening was positively radiant with magical power. The oak is the tree of Midsummer and at Midwinter, a log was lit and kept burning slowly for as long as possible.

The mighty oak was believed to cure disease. Those that wished to have a share in its healing powers would walk around the trunk, crawl through its cracks or bury bits of hair and fingernails under the tree. If the first fallen tooth of a child was buried underneath an oak, it was believed that the new teeth would come easily and grow nicely. Oak-leaf wine is a powerful drink, and its bark contains tannic acid and was used for tanning leather.

Pine (pinus sylvestris): The evergreen tree of the North, the tree of illumination. Its rune is Kenaz: The torch, the light, the gaining of knowledge. The magical wand of the God Frey has a pinecone at its end, symbolising the generative power of the pine. The tree's resin and needles were used to make incense. Young pine needles, light green in colour, were also used by the Northern people as a spice – especially for flavouring grilled meat.

Rowan (sorbus aucuparia): A tree of house-protection, which was often planted by the gate to ward off both disease and unwelcome visitors. A necklace made of its berries was considered a strong protection against illness. According to German folklore, carrying a piece of rowan wood will keep you from getting lost in the woods at night.

Spindle tree (euonymous europæus): The spindle tree is rarely seen today. It was associated with the sky queen Frigga, the spinner of clouds. The wood of the spindle tree was therefore used to make, yes, spindles.

Willow (salix spp.): The willow is one of my favourite trees, and it has always fascinated me. In my native Germany the hanging branches of this tree has earned it the name *Trauerweide*, which means mourning willow – comparable to its British nickname Weeping Willow. The perfect tree for unhappy lovers to meet by.

The willow grows where the ground is moist: Near lakes and in marshy areas. As people have always considered marshy lands to be lifeless and ghostly, the willow itself was believed to be haunted by ghosts. The willow's growth is also rather peculiar, and by the light of the moon it can surely make people image they are seeing spooks. Therefore, the tree joined the long blacklist of the Church in medieval times.
Women that were seen at night lurking around a willow tree were

believed to be witches, communicating with the demonic spirits within the tree. Its seeds were believed to be a contraceptive, which could explain what these women were doing by the willow tree at night in the first place. The weeping tree is very much connected to the mysterious aspects of femininity, and its wood is very suitable for use in feminine magic – especially sorcery of a darker nature, such as moon magic.

The willow's supple twigs are perfect for making baskets, and its bark can be used to brew an aspirin-like painkiller. To me, Laguz is definitely the rune associated with the willows.

Yew (taxus baccata): The yew, being one of the longest-lived trees in Northern Europe, represents immortality. Because of this it was planted on sacred sites, especially burial grounds. Even today we can find the yew tree in graveyards.

The yew is poisonous, and in hot weather it gives off a resinous mist, which shamans have inhaled to gain visions. The yew resin can be burnt as incense to communicate with the shadow-side and the dead – however; it is rather toxic and, unless you want to rejoin your departed relatives permanently, must not be inhaled.

Yew wood is good for making arrows. Uller, the God of winter and archery in Norse mythology, lives in Ydalir, a sacred yew grove. The rune Eihwaz means both yew and bow.

When The Trees Were Silenced

When the trees were silenced
Yggdrasil's children fell
bloodstained leaves decaying
and noone was left to tell
the tales of the gods, of fates
and of the timeless worlds
wisdom we people once knew
of the wonders of life
and of nature's own way…

When the trees were silenced
by the ones that fooled you well
when the trees were silenced
because they know the truth to tell
sorrow is the name of their song
the memory lives on
the spirit of the green man has gone
why has it been so long?
The seeker hears the cries within

Will you remember the trees proud and tall?
Will you listen and answer nature's call?
See, your dead world is starting to fall
let life return

THE ARCANE WORLD OF PLANTS

Our forebears had extensive knowledge of the plants that grew all around them. They used this know-how to use plants for food, for making and colouring clothes, as beauty-products and of course medicines.

Plants were also used for magical purposes, and folklore tells us of many flora-based spells. The local wise ones knew how to invoke the magical power of the plant to use it as a protective amulet or as incense, hallucinogenic, poison or even as a gateway to other worlds. Herbs were burned, hung in a room or carried in leather purses or amulets.

Below is a list of a few plants that were important to our ancestors. Most of them already grew in the countryside at that time, but a few plants were introduced from other countries and found their way into local folklore.

Alant (inula germanica): This was also called Odin's head or Odin's eye in Germany, and was regarded as a sacred plant. Alant was believed to be a defender against malevolent supernatural forces. In order for the plant to have healing qualities, it had to be collected with the first sound of thunder, so that it would be blessed with the power of Thor. It was used for relieving chest coughs, as a worm treatment and to increase appetite.

Arnica (arnica montana): Arnica was used to heal bruises and swellings. It is antiseptic and pain relieving.

Berry leaves: A brew made of bramble leaves and roots has long been used as remedy for diarrhoea and skin irritations. A tea of blackcurrant leaves can also relieve diarrhoea and colds. Blueberry juice is known to be a remedy for diarrhoea in children. Blueberry tea has been used for infections of the mouth and throat, and also for soothing tired and dry eyes. Tea from strawberry leaves is believed to be a good drink for pregnant women in the last weeks of the pregnancy to strengthen the uterus and aid an easy birth. Similarly, tea from raspberry leaves can ease menstrual discomfort.

Camomile (matricaria chamomilla): Camomile was called Balder's brow by our Germanic ancestors. It has always been one of the most popular and effective healing plants, easing all kinds of infections both externally and internally. Camomile is soothing and mild and it is very good to use for children. Sitting in a camomile bath is also helpful for vaginal infections and, of course, personal hygiene. A steam bath will also relieve haemorrhoids. Inhaled, camomile soothes respiratory inflammations. A tea calms the stomach and can also be used for washing sore or infected eyes. Camomile is a known hair-conditioner and lightener, and can be used together with rhubarb, which also lightens hair. On Summer Solstice, camomile was seen as especially powerful and was collected together with thyme and mugwort to protect the household against all ill.

Dandelion (taraxacum officinale): A tea made from dandelion leaves cleanses the blood and has been used to detoxify the body. It can be combined with nettle and birch leaves as a real spring-cleaning for your guts. Dandelion wine, which is made from the yellow flowers, is very beneficial for the blood circulation if it is enjoyed in moderation.

Fennel (foeniculum vulgare): A tea made from fennel seeds calms the stomach and helps against wind and abdominal pain. It also promotes production of milk in nursing mothers. Fennel is a strongly scented plant, and its seeds were worn in an amulet to protect from psychic harm.

Fern (matteuccia struthioppteris): This plant, growing in the shadows of the trees in the deep dark woods that elves, kobolds and gnomes call home, was long seen as a very mysterious plant. Its hidden seeds were believed to contain magical powers. Though hard to find, they were highly desirable and, according to folklore, seeds could only be found on special nights like Midsummer Night or May Eve.

The magically potent seeds of the fern were used for meeting dead relatives, having a successful hunt, making its wearer invisible, enabling him to obtain treasures like gold and silver, winning card-games and communicating with animals. It was believed that if a person walks in the woods and walks right through a fern and the seeds drop into her or his shoes (which is very unlikely to happen), it is a sign of great luck and the seeds will provide a magical advantage. Indeed, peasants desired fern seeds so much that in the 16th century its use became prohibited in Germany and people could risk accusation of witchcraft if they were caught collecting them.

Ground Ivy (glechoma hederacea): In German, this plant is called Gundelrebe and was named after the Valkyrie Gundja who, according to Jakob Grimm's books, was supposed to have used this as a healing plant. The ground ivy was a popular healing and magical plant to the early Germanic people, and they believed the plant to be inhabited by a nature spirit. It was believed to be the favourite food of kobolds and other supernatural forest creatures. In spring, people would follow the kobolds' example and ingest the good spirit as well as sorely needed nutrition after a long winter. The ground ivy was also fed to cows during this season to increase the milk yield.

Lavender (lavandula officinalis): A tea of lavender flowers relieves anxiety, stress, sleeplessness, nausea, dizziness, headaches and bad breath. A massage with lavender oil (again, diluted of course with carrier oil) is particularly effective, and it makes a great anti-depressant. A cloth with a few drops of lavender oil placed by the pillow will aid a good night's sleep. Lavender will also soothe skin conditions like allergies or insect bites, and when rubbed into the skin it will help keep mosquitoes and other insect nuisances away. Lavender, together with sage, can be burned as incense at the beginning of a shamanic journey to purify the area and chase distracting influences away.

Mugwort (artemisia vulgaris): This was commonly used for women's complaints. In ancient Rome, this plant was dedicated to the Goddess Diana. Mugwort was also believed to have the power to protect a couple against negative influences that could split them up. Incense based on the plant was used for clairvoyance, and was believed to increase magical dreams or visions.

Mullein, Candlewick, Hag's Taper (verbascum thapsus/phlomoid): Mullein was very important to the sun cult, and was especially sacred during Summer Solstice. It was believed that on this day, the magical seeds of the fern (see above) could be found if one laid a mullein leaf underneath the fern. The soft furry hair on the leaves and stem were used as candlewicks. It was also believed that witches used mullein as lamps in their rituals, thus the name Hag's Taper. This plant was also believed to be a contraceptive if a woman wore the root around her neck, close to the heart. However, this would only be effective if the root was gathered with a special ceremony in the Midsummer night (And still I would not consider this to be a very reliable form of birth-control...)

Mullein is said to keep insects and mice away. The seeds are a sedative to fish, making them easy to catch. Mullein was further used to cure dry coughs and throat infections.

Nettle (urtica dioica): Nettle was widely used by the Germanic people. Dedicated to Thor, this plant was believed to offer protection from lightning. Nettle is rich in iron and vitamins and was eaten in soups and salads or baked into bread. However, only the fresh young leaves in spring are used. Wine and beer was made from nettle as well. In folklore, nettle, also called stinging nettle, or Brennessel (burning nettle) in German, was associated with the burning pain of love and the wise women would mix nettle seeds into their love-potions. Nettle was worn

in a sewn cushion or talisman to attract a lover. Nettle was further used to strengthen male potency. Nettle root can be used as a hair-conditioner, to strengthen the scalp and roots.

Plantain (plantago major): The "weed" plantain, which grows everywhere, annoying the gardener, was used as a life safer in the past. Its fresh leaves would be pressed against a bleeding wound.

Parsley (petroselinum crispum): The seemingly inconspicuous herb that adds a fresh taste to dishes and makes a great garnish actually has a rather dark history. In large doses, parsley was used as an abortive. Parsley oil is indeed rather poisonous, so the procedure was not without danger. Its clandestine use gained parsley the reputation of being associated with the devil in the middle ages, and parsley use was connected to black magic. It was called Maitre Persil in central Europe, indicating that the devil was the leader of the midwives and abortionists.

Parsley is a stimulant, and the Pagans used the herb for love-magic and love-potions. The roots were also said to be part of the ointment witches used for flying.

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis): Rosemary stimulates the blood circulation. It is refreshing and uplifting, thus good for concentration and memory. Shamans in Northern Eurasia would rub the herb into the skin for stimulation. Rosemary was also considered an aphrodisiac, and has been used to stimulate sexual excitement. Massaging with the oil should be avoided during pregnancy, as it can induce premature labour. Rosemary has also been used as a part of the bridal garland in Germany. It was believed to spell bad luck if rosemary was kept in the bedroom, and to dream about the herb was believed to be a warning of impending death. It was custom to lay a branch of rosemary in the coffin next to the dead. Again, we see the relationship between sexual arousal and death.

Sage (Salvia officinalis): Sage strengthens nerves and the stomach, and reduces night-sweat. Sage is antiseptic, and gargling with a brew of sage helps both oral hygiene and sore throats. Sage reduces milk production, and a sage tea is thus helpful for mothers that stop breast-feeding. Leaves of sage, put in an amulet, were believed to protect against negative spirits.

St. John's Worth (hypericum perforatum): A herb dedicated to the magical night of Midsummer, which was renamed St. John's night when the Christians annexed it. A tea from the worth is soothing and uplifting if you are stressed, depressed or suffering from anxiety. A tea is also very useful right before or after meditation. St. John's Worth is antiseptic, and thus helpful if you have skin infections, spots, boils, burns or wounds.

Valerian (valeriana officinalis): Valerian was dedicated to the God Balder, and was called "Balder's herb" by our ancestors. Its German name is Baldrian. This herb is still used as a medicine for calming the nerves, soothing tensions and restoring harmony. Valerian was also believed to be an aphrodisiac. One reason for this is that the herb attracts cats who go crazy when they smell this herb and cats were a strong symbol of sexual desire by virtue of being the totem animal of the Goddess Freya. This has earned this herb the nickname "cat-herb".

Valerian was believed to protect against all dark forces, even the darkest of them all, the plague. In the middle ages, a bundle of dried valerian was hung in the bedroom to keep demons away. Apparently the bundle would turn itself around if an enemy entered the room. The smoke of valerian also played a part in an exorcism.

Wild Thyme (thymus serpullum): A medical and magical plant with a very long tradition, dedicated to the Goddess Freya. Wild Thyme was believed to be protective during childbirth.

Yarrow (achillea millefolium): A tea of yarrow is believed to be beneficial for women to drink during springtime. Yarrow is both balancing and a light aphrodisiac. It is a remedy for cramps, and wise herbal women used the herb to control irregular menstrual cycles. It was also used by nursing mothers for washing sore nipples (camomile is also good for this). Yarrow is antiseptic and closes wounds, and was used in

ancient times to heal the wounds of warriors. A sitting bath is thus also an effective remedy for haemorrhoids. Yarrow was believed to bring easy sleep and sweet dreams, keeping nightmares away and in old times the leaves were held over children's eyes at bedtime. A yarrow sprig held over the eyes was also believed to give second sight. Yarrow was another ingredient of the witch's flying ointment.

I should mention that my little herb guide here is certainly not a medical guide. Even though I give suggestions on how to use herb teas and brews to ease light discomfort, you should obviously always seek professional advise if you suspect a disease or are in doubt about the correct usage. The herbs mentioned above are generally very harmless, however it would be unwise to blend your own herbal medicine without proper instructions and in great dosages some herbs can be more harmful than good. One must also remember that herbs today have been polluted, making them less effective or even damaging to our system. Avoid picking herbs near roadsides or fields, where they can have been exposed to car exhaust or pesticide. Go deep into the countryside to get your magical herbs. It might be safer to grow your own herbs or to buy them from a health-shop.

It might also be worth mentioning that our ancestors used hemp as a healing plant. The plant was found in the Oseberg ship in Norway, the Viking burial mount of a wealthy woman. Without sticking my hand into the wasp's nest that is the debate about legalization of cannabis, I feel that it is our right to collect and to grow all kinds of plants.

The Witch's Flying Ointments

Several plants were said to be ingredients of the witch's flying ointment. Amongst those commonly thought to be part of are the following: Belladonna (atropa belladonna), henbane (hyoscyamus niger), wolf's bane (aconitum napellus), fly agar (amanita muscaria), hemlock (conium maculatum) and, as I have mentioned above, yarrow and parsley. The selected herbs were usually mixed with oils or fat and the thick salve was either rubbed into the skin, often directly into the armpits, on the forehead, between the thighs and smeared directly on the genitals or anus or even inserted into the anus itself, used as an enema (I don't recommend this…).

Belladonna is sexually stimulating for women. For men, however, it does exactly the opposite. With help of belladonna, witches achieved an ecstatic trance by using the shaft of a broom, anointing it with belladonna and using it for sexual pleasure. Belladonna means "beautiful woman". Women in ancient Rome and Greece used it to get beautiful eyes, due to its content of atropine, which, like LSD, enlarges the pupils.

The F**ly Agar** mushroom was in Germany called Berzerkerwut, meaning "berserker fury", and warriors used it to gain courage. In many cultures this mushroom was used as a hallucinogenic and the Volva's stool was red, sometimes with white spots.

Henbane, called Bulmeurt in Norwegian and Bilsenkraut in German, ranks on top of the witch's herb list. The Germanic people used it for magical trances and sexual arousal, thus Seidr and fertility-rituals. Naturally, it is also the herb of the Greek Goddess Hekate. Henbane is a hallucinogenic narcotic, and may give the feeling of flying and changing into another shape when taken in large doses. Commonly the seeds were heated on iron plates and the steam inhaled. The seeds were also thrown on the heat in the steam bath houses – or saunas. Beer with a low alcohol content often had henbane seeds added to it. Rubbed against the genitals the seeds were used to increase the sex drive in both men and women. Henbane was thus used by the enchantress to make her chosen victim helplessly aroused with desire for her.

Hemlock was used as a local anaesthetic and sedative, which also causes hallucinations. The botanicer Hieronymus Bock observed that goats like to eat it and "get all silly afterwards" (goats are also crazy about tobacco). In ancient times, hemlock was said to make men into eunuchs, which could mean that they were drugged to the point where they could no longer get an erection. Socrates was executed with hemlock in ancient Greece. It is a horrible death, as the plant paralyses the muscles and the victim chokes while fully conscious.

Tyr's helm, wolf's-bane or aconite: Whatever you call this plant, it is still very poisonous. In the Middle Ages, a killer would mix it into the drink of her or his victim. First, the hapless fellow would experience a burning, itching sensation, then numbness and sedation. Death occurred when the breathing muscles are paralysed and the heart stops. Ancient people used the plant to make poisonous arrows with to shoot animals or enemies. Rubbed into the skin, aconite gives a feeling of heat and itchiness combined with hallucinations. It affects the nervous system and may lead to the impression that the user is clothed in feathers or furs, or even changing into an animal. It can also induce sexual arousal to the point of a trance.

These poisonous herbs should not be messed with, and certainly not taken internally! They can be deadly or at the very least make you sick. I have known several people (myself included) who have tried to mix their own hallucinogenic, resulting in nothing more but a headache, nausea, a rush and other discomfort. Please do not experiment without having detailed and safe instructions.

SACRED AND MAGICAL DRINKS

Alcoholic drinks made from apple, oak-leaf, dandelion flowers, nettle, or mead, to name but a few, are especially powerful if one spices them up with special herbs, or charges the wine with the desired energy whilst brewing – like drawing a rune in it or visualising a rune in the liquid. With this, your unique wines could keep you in good health and aid your visions or even, as an old mead book informs me (Mjødboka by Welle Gjest), "make good company stay longer" (and) "send unwanted guests straight home and keep them away". Be sure to label the bottles!

THE RUNES

The Germanic name	sound/letter	meaning
Fehu	F	Cattle, wealth
Uruz	U	Aurochs, strength, courage
Thurisaz	TH	Giant, thorn
Ansuz	A	A God, divine power
Raido	R	Riding, wheel, motion
Kenaz	K or C	Torch, light, pine
Gebo	G	Gift, talent
Wunjo	W or V	Perfection, joy, prosperity
Hagalaz	H	Hail, formative causation, hidden influences
Nauthiz	N	Need, necessity
Isa	I	Ice, static force
Jera	J or Y	Harvest, year, season, completion
Eihwaz	between E and I	Yew, bow, defence
Pertho	P	The way of the Wyrd
Algiz	Z	Elk, psychic protection
Sowulo	S	Sun, victory
Teiwaz	T	The God Tyr, sword, power, justice
Berkana	B	Birch, regeneration, purification, fertility
Ehwaz	E	Horse, transformation
Mannaz	M	Man, or, rather – human
Laguz	L	Lake, water, life energy and intuition

Inguz	NG	Frey, fertility, limitless expansion
Othila	O	Inherited land, possessions, ancestry
Dagaz	D	Day, noon, daylight

This is my (very basic) interpretation of the runes... I am discussing the single, upright rune only, the reversed and face-down positions often have a different meaning.

I have been very inspired by Freya Aswynn's book "Leaves of Yggdrasil", since I also personally have known her and learned a few valuable things about rune magic from her when I was living in London.

Experts on runic scripts suggest that there is no evidence that individual runes were ever used for magical practise. However, they also have no evidence that they were not. We do have evidence that many magicians today use runes for spells and divination with amazing results.

Fehu: Represents the good things in life. A Fehu talisman is useful for gaining wealth, friendliness and merit. In divination it may indicate an increase in wealth, luck, success or plenty.

Uruz: Uruz represents the primal energies of creativity and fertility. Great potential, power and courage, but also the danger of being careless. A talisman is useful if one is undertaking an adventure, journey or starting a business. In magical workings, the Uruz rune is used to invoke physical strength and the regeneration of the body. In divination it may indicate striving for a goal and the will for independence.

Thurisaz: A rune dedicated to Thor. A rune of attack and defence. Its power can be invoked to keep an enemy at bay. This rune can also be used to test others, or the self, in order to overcome fears. In divination the Thurisaz rune may indicate a time of challenge ahead.

Ansuz: This rune means "a God" and is mainly dedicated to Odin, master of the runes. Ansuz is particularly good for invoking inspiration and wisdom, and a talisman is helpful with creative work such as writing or performing. The rune can be used to communicate with Odin. In divination, Ansuz may indicate answers gained through inspiration and inner knowledge.

Raido: Symbolises a journey on horseback, which also represents the ride into the underworld. A talisman is good for travelling and in magical workings it can be useful for travelling the other side, for understanding great changes and communicating with spirits. The rune represents change in the self, new ideas, new ways of life and the need to be in control of oneself in one's journey through life.

Kenaz: The torch represents human's ability to control fire, and is a symbol of magical power and initiation. A talisman is good for attaining knowledge of higher things. This rune is useful for creative purposes and sex magic. In divination is may indicate positive energy, enthusiasm and learning.

Gebo: This rune indicates a gift, a present from the Gods, a talent, a gift to the higher self, hospitality and sacrifice. It is a reminder that a gift demands that a gift be given back. In all situations in life, one must give in order to receive. Gebo represents the balance between opposite forces. This rune is used to bind people, and in the old days it was thus a symbol of betrothal in marriage. In divination is may indicate generosity, joy and friendship.

Wunjo: This rune symbolises joy and pleasure. A talisman is good for a person's work to be noticed, and for passing tests and exams successfully. Wunjo means wishing, so this is the rune to use in a spell to get your desire fulfilled (to me it has proved to be very powerful). Draw the rune with one finger on your forehead and visualise it sinking into your skin whilst expressing your wish and viewing the desired situation in front of you. But, as always, be careful with what you wish for. It just might come true.

Hagalaz: This rune represents the subconscious and hidden feelings and influences from the past. Hagalaz is dedicated to the Norn Urd (the past) and also Hel, the Goddess of the underworld, who in this context both represent the subconscious and its hidden memory. Hagalaz is further connected to the underworld; in fact Hagalaz is the rune to use to enter the underworld and your own subconscious to meet your hidden self.

Hagalaz is also the rune of the Volva. The words Hægtessa or Hagedisa, both old Germanic or Anglo-Saxon words for witch, are related to the Hagalaz rune. The word Hægtessa refers to a woman sitting on a hedge – the woman who sits on the edge of this world and the spirit world. The English expression "an old hag", which is used to describe the classic witch image of an old and scary woman, indicates the connection between the old wise woman and the Hagalaz rune. Hagalaz thus symbolises dark feminine powers and is the rune to use in magic of a darker nature.

Hagalaz is a reminder that negative feelings must not be suppressed or locked away. Such emotions must be dealt with in order to change them into a positive inspiration. Thus, in divination, this rune shows the need to come to terms with the past in order to move on into the future. Hagalaz manifests as an abrupt force, a challenge coming your way, a necessary situation that clears the way, removing all that is irrelevant.

Nautiz: This rune symbolises necessity. Nautiz shows the need to overcome our fears and the sudden strength and ability a person can possess in a time of crisis. A talisman is good for success, to overcome restrictions and to attain necessities that may seem unreachable. In divination, Nautiz may indicate restriction coming from within the self and the necessity of recognising one's own fate.

Isa: Symbolises survival, challenge, strife and self-containment. In divination Isa indicates a frozen situation – slow motion towards a goal or even a temporary standstill, perhaps due to a blockage. No immediate change can be expected. In magical workings, Isa can be used to halt or block a person's action, thus this rune is suitable to stop a psychic attack directed towards you.

Jera: A very pleasant rune, Jera symbolises long-term success through harmony with nature. In divination it indicates a positive, long-lasting change in one's life. A talisman can be useful for a happy home and a good harvest and other good things in life. This rune appeared at the rune casting of my daughter's naming.

Eihwaz: This rune symbolises the yew tree, and therefore also the immortality that the yew indicates. Eihwaz means "the bow", and this rune is mainly dedicated to the God Uller, the God of winter and archery. As mentioned before, Uller resides in a grove of yew trees. Uller was called Holler in Germany and may thus be the male counterpart of the Goddess Holda, Frau Holle, Goddess of the snow and mistress of the underworld.

Uller also has a shadowy side, and the yew tree is therefore associated with death. Thus the Eihwaz rune can be used for magic of a darker kind. In Seidr trances the Eihwaz rune can be sent out to chase a soul, or, in other words: To haunt an opponent. Eihwaz also defends against attack. A talisman is useful for hunting; whether for a job, a flat or a partner. It can be helpful for overcoming shyness and realising an idea. In divination the Eihwaz rune encourages you to "go for it, there are opportunities for growth, seize them".

Pertho: This rune's meaning is not completely clear, but, fittingly, it appears to represent uncertainty and unawareness of how ones Wyrd (fate) will turn out. This rune is useful for exploring the subconscious in order to find hidden possibilities, abilities and undiscovered talents. Pertho can be used to seek hidden knowledge and the collective memory of our ancestors, which lies buried deep within you.

Algiz: Algiz means elk and serves as a protective shield against danger, especially psychic harm. This rune should be used in magical workings to protect you. A talisman will also provide divine protection. The Algiz rune is called the life rune and, when reversed, it symbolises death. In

divination it indicates health, pleasure, success and a position of power – that everything goes your way. Facing downwards it indicates that you are at risk of being attacked by negative influences, thus you are an easy target and have to strengthen your defences. You can draw the rune onto your forehead and visualise it, absorbing its energy into your body.

Sowulo: Sowulo symbolises the power of the sun. The sun was, and still is, regarded as feminine in the North, as she is life giving, strengthening and nurturing. The worship of the Goddess Sol has survived from the ancient matriarchal tradition. Wagons with sun wheels have been found in Scandinavia dating from the Bronze Age. In fact, these wagons with the sun wheels could symbolise a ride into higher realms. A talisman provides knowledge of transcendent powers, clairvoyance and spiritual protection. Sowulo can also be invoked for the power of the will, gaining control of the self, victory and vitality. In divination this rune generally indicates achievements, good luck and vitality.

Teiwaz, Tyr: The rune of Tyr, the God of war, law and justice. Teiwaz can be invoked for gaining justice, honour and victory. A talisman is useful for building courage and resolution prior to a fight, either of a physical, legal or moral nature. Teiwaz also symbolises a sword and was often painted or carved into shields and weapons. In divination it indicates justice and fairness, or, depending what other runes surround it, struggle, conflict and the need to fight for one's rights.

Berkana: This rune is dedicated to the Goddess Frigga. Berkana is the rune for healing, good health, harmony and peace of mind. It keeps children safe from harm, thus a talisman is ideal for your little ones. The Berkana rune can also be invoked for fertility, pregnancy, an easy birth and motherhood. Berkana cleans one of negative energies. In divination it indicates plenty, happiness, harmony and romance.

Ehwaz: Ehwaz is useful for relationships and tribal cooperation in times of crisis. Ehwaz can be used in magical workings to connect people – or to keep them apart. A talisman is helpful in times of crisis to call upon divine aid and to find help from others. Ehwaz means "horse", and the horse was very important to the Germanic people. Horses have been used and worshipped in fertility rites and, likewise, this rune is useful for sexuality, prosperity and fertility. Thus Ehwaz is dedicated to the twins Frey and Freya.

Mannaz: Mannaz means "man", referring to both "weapon-men" (men) and "weaving-men" (women), as they were called. To work with Mannaz is useful for personal development. A talisman is also helpful to master intellectual debates.

Laguz: Laguz symbolises the energy of water and is another very magical and beneficial rune useful for shamanic working and sorcery. Just recently I had a very spiritual experience with Laguz and thus discovered the rune for myself. I also became aware of the connection between the Laguz rune and my star sign, Cancer. And like I said earlier, to me Laguz is the rune associated with the willow tree.

As Laguz is associated with intuition and feeling, the rune can help you to gain access to someone's subconscious by visualising the Laguz rune between the particular person's eyes whilst calling him or her to you. A talisman can be used to make contact, to attract a lover or friend. In divination it indicates nourishment, spiritual growth, evolution, a deserved reward or a change for the better.

Inguz: Inguz is good to use for spiritual workings, to open an invisible door or to draw a door-way. Useful for Seid-magic, fertility- and earth-magic. Inguz is associated with fertility and thus dedicated to Frey. Inguz can be used to fascinate people, and to draw them to you. Draw the rune on your forehead, visualise it and absorb it into your body. A talisman can help to gain respect from others and for gaining positions of influence. In divination it may indicate wisdom, advice or approval from others.

Othila: A talisman or a ceremony involving the Othila rune is good for matters regarding the individual and the family. It can be invoked for the family's well being and harmony, for improving family conflicts, for

a good marriage or to gain an inheritance. Othila can be used to call upon ancestral powers and to guard family fortunes. This is also the rune to use to bind a clan together and strengthen its members' loyalty to each other. In divination, Othila is generally a reminder to focus on the clan, family and friends, yet it may also indicate a good marriage or inheritance is ahead.

Discussing the Othila rune I must point out the sad affair that the symbol in particular and the sun-wheel are by the ignorant crowd branded for being "Nazi-symbols". In fact we often see that the entire Northern heritage is regarded as "Nazi". Needless to say that the ancient faith and natural values of our ancestors have nothing to do with 20th century politics of any kind and even if the actual Nazis (… and we must not forget that Christianity was their religion) used a few Germanic symbols, it does not at all mean the ancient traditions can be discriminated for this.

Dagaz: Dagaz is the power of daylight. Being the last rune of the Futharc, it shows us that the Futharc is an eternal cycle. Dagaz symbolises the end of things and thus the coming of a new beginning. A talisman or visualisation of the rune can help to stimulate spiritual growth and understanding. It can be used for development and the passing on to the new phase of life. It can also be used in times of depression in order to see the light. In divination it symbolises successful conclusion, spiritual growth, renewal, and a change from the present situation.

WHAT IS MAGIC AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

In ancient societies throughout the world, magic was a part of the day-to-day life. Even if only a few people were recognised as "official wise ones, witches or magicians", everybody was, in one way or another, working magic. Many of our traditions are, in fact, magical workings. Just to hang a horseshoe outside the house for good luck is a small act of magic. The same goes for picking flowers at Midsummer night or charging a rune.

With the introduction of Christianity, the arcane art of magic was considered to be 'the work of the Devil'. In times of suppression magic became the common people's only hope of achieving something. This might be the main reason why its practice became demonised. Tyrants have always forbidden the practice of magic. People were not allowed to help themselves or know the secrets of nature. The wise ones of the villages, who often didn't have much more than their great wisdom and the respect of their people, were a threat to the tyrants in power.

Still today the art of magic is severely misunderstood and the word "occult", which simply means "hidden", is commonly believed to be something negative and dangerous – even evil.

This fear of the unknown, imprinted so deeply in people's minds, often leads the individual that is fascinated by the occult to believe he or she is entering a dangerous field. This means that the individual is not capable of freeing his or her mind from anxiety and therefore is expecting evil spirits to await them when they enter the spirit world. With this in

mind, it is no surprise that the aspiring magician could be frightened into insanity or even believe him- or herself to be possessed by demons. Such demons, however, are little more than the spiritual travellers won personal fears and destructive thoughts.

To work magic means to work with the forces of nature and to explore the unknown in order to achieve personal harmony, protection and fulfilment, or to find answers to questions. Magic is our way to communicate with the Cosmos we are a part of. Deep down, I think all of us believe in the power of magic.

Although any person could, theoretically, take part in rites and work magic, only the few truly gifted ones who dedicated their existence to the secret arts were entitled to call themselves magicians, witches, warlocks, shamans or Volvas.

Magic can be used for positive or negative purposes. To apply colours to magic is not very appropriate, and terms like “white magic” and “black magic”, are just descriptions colored by Christian dualism. There is no real dividing line between white (benevolent) magic or black (sinister) magic. Magic is magic, and to practise the art one must acknowledge the eternal cycle of nature, that day follows night and winter follows fall, and strive for the same balance in one’s own life.

No colour should be added as a visual aid to simplify these natural forces for the people who are unable to see beyond artificial Christian categorizations. If someone misuses or abuses the powers of magic, it is not magic that is to blame, but rather the ignorant individual who acts irresponsibly and who most likely won’t have any success with his or her attempt.

To work magic, one has to offer something. In order to get you have to give. Magic is an exchange: First you express your intent, then you feed that intent with energy, release that energy into the higher spheres, which in turn are connected to your subconscious and, if you are successful, you will get your desire fulfilled.

Energy is the most significant factor in the magical process. A magical symbol remains powerless if it is not charged with power first. Good conductors of energy include bodily fluids such as semen or blood – especially menstrual blood. A well-planned and executed ritual would still remain ineffective without strong energy - emotion and visualisation. A sexual climax plus a vivid visualisation while you express your intent, for example, would be ideal.

To work magic, the individual has to make contact with the feminine part within the self – the hidden shadow side. If you want to open the doors to higher realities, you must learn to communicate with this inner self first. Such a dialogue can be achieved with a lot of practice, patience and understanding, but as in all things, some individuals are more gifted than others.

In the next chapter I will introduce you to Seidr, the oldest and most earthly form of magic in the North.

SEIDR – NORTHERN SHAMANISM

In ancient Northern Europe the oldest form of magic practised was Seidr (also spelled Sejd or Seid). In form and function, this magic is comparable to what is known as shamanism and Wicca (witchcraft). Seidr is primal, earthly and pure. It involves both the body and soul, establishes a contact with the self and with nature and it includes such practices as divination, soul-journeys, sexual magic, herbalism and sorcery. Seidr was often worked in connection with fertility rites dedicated to the Vanir Gods. And naturally Freya, the Vanir Goddess, was the source of the art of Seidr.

Our forebears believed that Seidr was a gift from the Gods, a gift that was usually restricted to women. If a male had received the gift, it was believed that he would have to become a woman in spirit in order to work his art properly. Therefore, the practice of Seidr was seen as unsuitable for men. Yet there have been men working Seidr, called "Seidmenn" or warlocks, and as even Odin was known as a magician there is no real reason to argue that men cannot practise shamanism and earthly magic. It has been written that Odin learned how to work Seidr from Freya, while he taught her the practice of Galdr. A Galdr is a specific magical practice that involves rune chanting and poetry.

Little has been written about Seidr practice. One reason for this is that Seidr cannot be fully described. One has to experience it from within. Some people ask me how I'm able to practise Seidr when there are no real written guidelines. How do I know that what I do is really Seidr, not some other form of magic? My answer is that I try to use the powers that are within my own mind and body, and I am quite sure my foremothers did the same.

Seidr practice involves entering a trance in order to travel to other dimensions of reality. A trance could be achieved through ecstatic chanting and dancing, sexual stimulation, the smell of strongly scented herbs or oils, or by rubbing an ointment consisting of hallucinogenic herbs into the skin. The monotone sound of rhythmic instruments or handclaps would send the soul to the other side. Once there, the spiritual traveller would communicate with spirits, totem animals, gods or dead relatives in order to gain knowledge. The practitioner would also learn about her (or sometimes his) inner self and the universe.

It was believed that the most powerful Seidkone or Seidmann could direct this soul journey to any desired place. They could call upon an individual, influence that individual's mind – perhaps even send nightmares, disease and insanity. They were also believed to be able to influence animals and to be able to send out their fetch-animal to fight their battles. All this mental travelling would be done while the body remained motionless.

It was the art of Seidr that received most of the attention of outraged Christians. I am convinced that a lot of what was spitefully called "witchcraft" in medieval times was little more than a demonised version of Seidr practice. All the accounts of women rubbing themselves in pastes and oils made from poisonous plants, which enabled them to fly through the air on broomsticks surely sounds like Seidr to me.

Of course, these so-called witches didn't fly for real, but the mind-altering
substances they took enabled them to undertake astral journeys. The medieval people further believed that the witches would ride to the Sabbath on horses, stolen from local farmers during the night and returned the following morning. When the farmers came into the stable and the horse was all exhausted and wet with sweat, they were convinced that a witch had been riding it – a much more colourful alternative than

having to find a more plausible explanation.
It is further told that the witches would gather together to feast. There, they would dance, sing and have intercourse with the Devil and other demonic beasts. Far from having sex with the Devil as the Christians tried to make people believe, I reason that some of the participants of these clandestine gatherings were dressed in animal furs to invoke the spirit of that particular animal. The ritual itself was performed to call upon the fertility deities to ensure that their people, animals and the earth remained fruitful, not because some naughty witches felt like having an orgy.

In folklore, the witch is imagined to be riding a broomstick. The Goddess Frigga has been pictured by our Pagan ancestors riding on a distaff. The cat, which was accused of being the witch's favourite familiar, is the animal sacred to Freya. And the common image of the witch resembles the image of the wise old woman. The similarities are too many to ignore.

Through the practice of Seidr you can explore the other side, find the answers to your questions and influence your subconscious.

Enter a trance by chanting (a simple monotone "mmm…" can do) or dancing or by meditating to the sounds of a rhythmic instrument like a drum or a bone-rattle. The smell of burning herbs, essential oil or incense should stimulate your senses and aid your visions. Sit or lie on the ground while your mind travels freely. Visualise a hole or a crack, like a hole in the floor, or a hole in the earth for example, through which you can slip into the other side. Try to direct your journey to Yggdrasil, see the world tree with its roots and branches, then try to make contact with otherworldly beings. To return to our own reality, you should always go back in your mind the way you came until you reach the starting point of your journey.

FINDING YOUR FETCH-ANIMAL
Your fetch-animal or totem is your personal, protective animal spirit. It is your otherworldly companion, adviser and guardian. To get in contact with your fetch, you can do the ritual outlined below.
Find a place outdoors where you won't be disturbed. Prepare the area with incense and perhaps anoint a small area of your skin with a magical oil or ointment. While you prepare yourself, tell yourself that you intend to find your fetch. Chant or hum yourself into a trance and travel to Yggdrasil. Once you can visualise it vividly, picture the Norns – Urd, Verdandi and Skuld – sitting by the mighty tree. Ask them politely if the time is right to find your fetch-animal. If they don't answer, or even shake their heads, turn back the way you came and try again some other time. If they nod, continue your journey. Let your mind travel freely now. The first animal you meet will be your fetch-animal.

Do not try to force an animal to appear. Your fetch must come to you by itself. You should not expect to find your favourite animal, and you must not conjure up the image of your favourite animal on purpose. Often the fetch is an animal you never thought about – or even the type of animal you dislike the most. You could also meet several fetch-animals. It does not necessarily have to be an animal; it could also be a person or even a strange creature. Don't be disappointed if your fetch is not to your taste. There is a reason why it is your personal guardian and it is there to provide you with psychic protection, advise and wisdom. Get to know it and in future journeys it will accompany you, communicate with you and teach you.

In ancient times, the Volva would wander from village to village to foretell the future. After a good meal she would take her seat upon a platform and her helpers would chant ecstatic songs to carry her into the other side. These chants are the "Vardlokkur", the calling or lokking of the Vardr – the ward, the guardian or spirits. The word warlock may also be related to the vardlokkur.

A group-working to seek knowledge from the other side can be performed like this: Prepare the area. The participants should stand around the traveller and drum and/or chant to enable him or her to enter a trance-state. The individual should sit or lie down and allow the mind to slip away. He or she should try to make contact to the spirit

world and tell the others what he or she sees and hears.
Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, it takes a lot of practice to be able to make contact with the other side and some individuals are more gifted than others.

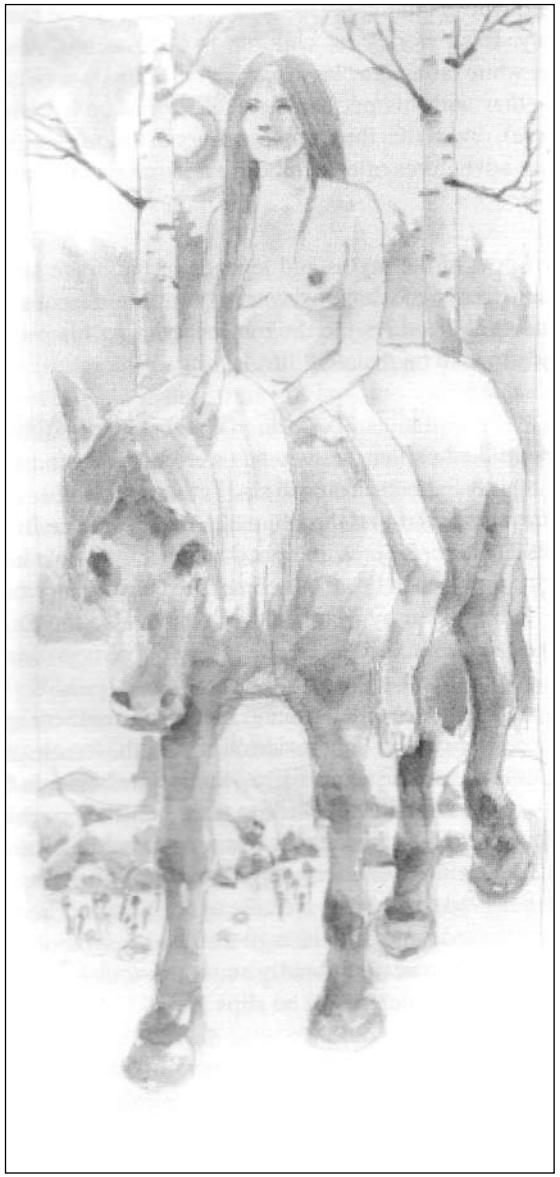
DREAMS
We are told that dreams are just a recapitulation of what we have experienced through the day. Yet dreams are also deeply hidden emotions, fears or longings. For some people, dreams appear to be meaningless – just dreams. For others, these night-time journeys are intense, emotional and seem very real. In the old times, people often paid great attention to dreams. They sought their answers there, met their true feelings or even gained insight about the future. In some tribal cultures, the word for dream is the same as soul-journey. How do we know that we are not somewhere else, that our soul is set free to travel and we experience another life?

Dreams try to tell you something. Work with them, try to understand and analyse. Learn to be conscious of what you are dreaming about and be aware of any possible messages. To seek an answer in your dream, repeat the same question over and over again in your mind before sleep overcomes you. Upon awakening, you may have the answer clear already or you can try to remember details of the dream to see if the answer was to be found there. You can also call, attract and influence others while they are dreaming. The ideal time to do this is around three a.m. at night. This is the time when most people are deepest in their sleep. It is also around this hour that most lives are born or pass away, and also when most supernatural events occur. Another good time is in the morning – maybe an hour before the individual is likely to get up. Then the individual is often half dreaming and half awake, and therefore will remember the strange encounter with you more clearly. So unless you know that the focus of your efforts works the graveyard shift or will be partying all night, this is the time to choose for such a working.
Prepare your room with incense and candles to create a more magical atmosphere, or simply lie in bed in the dark and let your mind travel. You will have to focus your mind strongly on the person. Visualise the person being asleep in bed and whisper your message into the person's ear. You can also try to influence the person's dream by visualising a situation with the two of you together.

Erotic energy is a very powerful tool in magical workings, and sensual stimulation was often part of a Seidr working. The true witch knows the art of enchantment and fascination. A very effective method to enchant and attract a person to you is by entering his or her dream as what is known as a Succubus or Incubus (female and male sex demons). Prepare yourself for the night; perhaps prepare the room to get the desired atmosphere with candles, incense, essential oils or music. Imagine yourself in the desired place with the desired person and be as erotic as you can with yourself. Visualise the object of your desire as clearly as possible. When you climax, see the person's face in front of you and visualise your energy flowing out of you into the person whilst calling the person's name. Then consider your work done and go to sleep.

Even if your chosen one dreamt about you, or otherwise picked up a strange feeling for you, your work will be rather ineffective if the person does not see you or doesn't even know you. Therefore, after the working you must make yourself seen or heard to the person or otherwise get him or her to remember this erotic encounter with you.

PSYCHIC PROTECTION
Should you have a hunch that negative energy surrounds you, or even believe that a curse has been put upon you, visualise a defensive rune like the Algiz or Eihwaz and absorb it into you. Imagine a strong wall of energy around you that fights off all negative influences. Then consider yourself strengthened from within. Be acutely aware that the moment you fear a curse upon you, you are more or less are cursed by your own fear. Sheer paranoia can make you create negative situations.



COMMUNICATING WITH THE ANIMAL SPIRIT

The people of natural, tribal cultures have always been living alongside wild animals. The beasts that surrounded them played a very important part in their lives and religious traditions. Animals are part of myths and legends around the world. In many stories of how the world was created, a female animal is said to be responsible. Imaginative and often very beautiful tales tell about enchanting creatures that are half human and half animal, or of an animal becoming human and vice versa. Animals mentioned in the myths have distinct personalities and fables often tell us about humans and animals communicating by just talking together.

The early Christians regarded these “Heathen myths”, like most other that was not strictly Biblical, to be the Devil’s work. In the Middle Ages, to be seen talking to an animal meant to risk an accusation of witchcraft. This was especially true with lonely old women, who naturally found great comfort in their animal friends. The Church frightened its congregations into believing that the talking animal was a demonic creature sent from hell to aid the witch or wizard in their evil doings. The main reason why close contact with an animal was demonised might have been because in the ancient days, a practitioner of the arcane arts often owned a personal pet or familiar. This was his or her magical companion, and a link between this world and the hidden realms.

If we look at fairytales or even cute little children’s stories, the main character is often surrounded, accompanied or even advised by one or several animals. Like mentioned earlier, fairytales often have hidden symbolism. An example is the fairytale Die Gaensemagd, about the

goose maid whose talking horse Fallada is the only one that knows her tragic story. Even stories for children like Pinocchio, Alice in Wonderland (the white rabbit is a classical spiritual animal) or Nils Holgersson (who, together with his pet hamster, flies away on a journey with the wild geese), reveal that the animal appears to be the guardian of the child and these adventures often symbolise a journey to the self and a new phase of life.

We know of the myths and legends of the brave hero and the dragon. The myths of the dragon-slayer may well represent a youth's journey to manhood. He slays the dragon, conquering his own childhood fears, ready to take on the adult life.

THE HORSE AND THE MAIDEN

I mentioned earlier that witches were believed to use horses to ride to the nightly Sabbath. You will also perhaps remember that people in Scandinavia believed that the Mare, a female creature from a world below, would enter bedrooms at night through a little hole in the floor in order to ride the sleeper. From this comes the Norwegian word Mareritt, meaning to be ridden by Mare, and of course also the English word nightmare.

A female horse is called a mare. As we can see there appears to be a link between the witches' night-ride on horses, the female creature that causes nightmares and the actual mare – the female horse. In Celtic mythology, the dead were believed to ride to the other side on white horses and it is in this world the shaman gets her or his wisdom. Thus, the word nightmare might also have a connection to this. In Britain, it is also traditionally believed that horses are able to see ghosts. The idea that the Mare enters the mortal world through a hole also symbolises shamanic practice. The shaman traditionally starts the soul-journey by visualising a hole through which she or he slips into.

A white or grey mare often appears in folklore, and in both Celtic and Germanic cultures white or grey horses (white horses are usually born black and gradually turn white) were sacrificed in fertility rites. A horse penis was often preserved and kept by the mistress of the house. The horse was sacred to the God Frey, and often the spring Goddess, the maiden, was pictured riding on a horse – usually naked. A horse was also often sacrificed to be buried with the dead. The killing of a horse in fertility rites and the horses' connection to the world of the dead again shows us these people's understanding of the connection between sex and death, and the idea that life continues after death.

Dreaming Wild White Horses

Down by a willow tree, a hidden place so rare
Across a silent lake, where their secrets lie bare
The most delightful scene to see
The dancing messengers of purity

Wild manes in the wind, she holds the key
Riding towards the dawn, skyclad and free
The maiden goddess, her spirit to me
Fills the cup with Eostre's sensuality

Passing white mares in the silver moonlight
Carriers of ghosts seeking the other side
Vanishing into the night before my eyes
Passing, leaving but a dream behind

Tales and legends tell us of the spiritual bond between the maiden and the horse. We know of the unicorns, the pure, white horse with a horn on its forehead that can only be seen and touched by the young maiden. This myth may symbolise the free-spirited young girl that has yet to experience her first love. The blushing maiden that discovers her own body, her feminine nature and who thus is very perceptive to any contact from the other side. A pubescent girl who dreams about riding on a horse, often naked, is said to dream about her freedom of spirit. Her riding on a horse could also symbolise her yearning for physical contact. The horse can be seen as the maiden's guide through the frightening process of growing up, becoming a woman, a wife and a mother. This is beautifully dramatised in the fairytale of the goosemaid and her horse Fallada.

Young girls often love horses. Riding is not just a sport for them; it is also the connection between them and the horse, the incredible feeling of riding the animal. These girls also see the horse as their best friend, someone they trust their secrets to. When I was a young girl, I had a great passion for horses and spent many hours a day by the stables. I also recall significant dreams of bareback-riding a wild horse and the incredible feeling of freedom it gave me.

CALLING THE ANIMAL SOUL

It was common in many tribal societies to call upon the animal souls before a hunt, and to thank the same after returning with the catch. The hunters would wrap the furs of wild animals around them, wear the animal's horns on their head – in short, become the animal. They would dance and chant and once in a trance, they would communicate with the animal soul. This was done to maintain a harmony between the people and the animal kingdom. Likewise, warriors often invoked a wild animal prior a battle to gain its strength and fury. The most common animals invoked by the Northern nations were wolves, bears or wild boars. There were three types of warrior-cults: The Berserkers, the Ulfhednar and the Svinfylking warriors. We know the expression "to go berserk", to go mad with rage. Originally going berserk meant to go into battle wearing only a bear-skin shirt, fighting with the rage and the strength of a bear. The Ulfhednar wore wolf skins and the boar warriors called upon the rage of the wild boar, using a fighting technique that was know as the *svinfylking*, the boar's head.

It would be a worthwhile practice to invoke an animal you admire in order to gain its grace, courage or other qualities you wish to obtain from it. You can also lie motionless, as in Seidr practice, and let your soul become the spirit of an animal of your choice.

You might have experienced an unusual, almost magical encounter with an animal. For example, walking alone in the forest, you turn around and notice that there is a wild animal watching you and you get the feeling that it follows you. It looks at you and you feel like it knows you or you even feel like it wants to tell you something. To the Pagans, such a meeting with an animal was often regarded as a sign or even a message from the Gods, with the animal serving as the messenger. This animal could also be a fetch-animal that shows itself in physical form.

Many of us own pets. We are attached to these, play with and even talk to them. For many of us pets are comforting, we feel they understand our problems and this demonstrates that humans need to have a relationship with animals. I certainly need animals around me. To be alone in a stable with horses and cows, for example, gives me an incredible feeling of inner peace.

Children love animals and they immediately show affection for them, unless they learn from their parents that animals are dirty and dangerous. To teach the poor child to fear, or even to hate animals is a terrible thing to do. Sadly, there are many people around the world who treat animals like lifeless things or who even mistreat them. Animals are viewed to be inferior to us and are seen as soulless creatures that were placed on this earth purely for us to use. Such people do not understand the needs and feelings of animals because they don't understand the animal within themselves. It is very important to realise that animals are part of Mother Nature, and that we in turn are a part of the animals. For we, too, have a wild nature within.

Our natural instincts are not something that should be suppressed. They are very necessary to any living creature. It is our instincts that give us the urge to survive and that tell us how to survive. Indeed, it is by acting out these urges that we feel truly alive. Our instincts tell us what is good for our body and what is poisonous. It is the natural instincts that make us aware of danger and that make us react in dangerous situations. Natural instincts tell the animal how to defend itself, when to fight, when to appear scary and when to run away. I think it is because humans have denied themselves many of these wild impulses that they have become so destructive towards their own environment and themselves, and at the same time unaware of any dangers surrounding them.

It would be a valuable exercise and a truly sensational experience for those who don't feel their inner animal to spend some time alone in nature without any modern facilities. When you are there, try not to think about yourself and your problems in the material world. In fact, try not to think at all, just sense yourself. Sense your immediate needs. Sense your environment: Smell, listen, feel and taste it. Feel the elements on your bare skin, the sunlight or the rain, wind or snow. Experience your inner wolf or wild cat and pretend that you are this great animal that is prowling through the woods sensing its environment.

Learn to know and trust your instincts and try to be alert at all times. I think the important thing is to learn to create a unity between your instincts, intuition, emotions and rational thinking.

WOLF – THE CALL OF THE WILD

One of the animals that has left the strongest impression in the human psyche is undoubtedly the wolf. The lupine has always been recognised as the symbol of freedom, the image of the wild man and the wild woman – our wild nature within.

Mythology has always paid special attention to the wolf. Two loyal wolves accompanied Odin. In Roman mythology, a female wolf raised the twins Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. It was women that first bonded with young wolves and made them tame. The North American Indians have many tales of humans having special encounters with a wolf. Indeed, several tribes even claimed to be related to the wolf.

The wolf is, after all, a predator, and our ancestors have always feared its savagery. People never liked the wolf stealing food from them, either.

However, the big bad wolf as we know him from fairytales and horror stories has been created by the Church. Since the wolf represents our own natural instincts, the wolf became a demonic creature, an earthly ambassador of the hounds of hell. No other animal suffered the same amount of undeserved persecution as the wolf, perhaps with the exception of the cat, which was even burned at the stake! Church records state several incidents where individuals were ripped apart and eaten by wolves. Strangely enough, all the alleged victims were good Christians and at the time of attack, they were walking either to or from the church. No evidence has ever been found to support these claims of wolven attacks (I got this information from a documentary on wolves

by the National Geographic Society). Wolves are in fact very shy and usually keep their distance from humans.

The wolf has been regarded as the natural enemy of sheep. And, with sheep being the chosen symbol for the followers of Christ, this might be another reason why the wolf is so demonised. People hated and feared the wolf so much that they attempted to practically eradicate them. Was the hope that killing off every last wolf would rid them of their own wolf within?

The wolf is certainly not "evil". The wolf is very intelligent and loyal to its kind and deserves to live by its own instincts.

Over the last few years, the wolf has begun to grow in numbers once again (much to the despair of angry Scandinavian sheep-farmers). Hopefully, this is a sign that people have become more aware of nature.

Serenade Of The Last Wolf

He runs into the night
Finding a place to hide
Why do they hunt him again?

His heart, it beats so fast
No sound, they moved on at last
Timidly he wanders his way

He only came for some food
Maybe even company
Sometimes he feels so alone
He is the last one of his kind
All his companions have died
Man signed their fatal destiny

His dreams tell him of ancient times
Of wolves and men running side by side
How delightful freedom must have been

Wild woman's mate and totem beast
Idolised he was, but suddenly all changed
When the men with false dogmas came

You call him the evil beast
But you are the real evil beast
You who damned nature's dear child
He cries his sorrow to the moon
A tear shines through the misty gloom
Can't you hear the last wolf's serenade?

Alone he sits by the lake
His image in the lake his only friend
Can't you hear the last wolf's serenade?

THE SELF

The ancient people were, like we are today, very conscious of their bodies. They enjoyed leisure, sports and games. They relaxed and bathed together. On Saturdays, Laugardag, the people in the North usually met in the steam-bath houses. It was important to be fit and healthy.

Like mentioned before, the body was stimulated to make contact with the spiritual side. Through bodily sensations we can stimulate the mind and make it send its emotions through the body. The body is an important metaphor in working magic. Bodily stimulation and physical activity such as dancing and chanting can bring the mind into an altered state of consciousness.

In the dualistic, patriarchal religions, the body is separated from the soul. The body is something shameful and dirty that must be covered. While the soul is reaching out for the divine spirit, the body is neglected. The attitude that the body was only meant for doing hard work and giving birth is obviously very unhealthy, not to mention frustrating. You cannot separate the soul from the body. The body needs to feel well in order for the mind to feel healthy and stimulated.

We know today of the importance massage and other forms of bodily stimulation have in the fight against disease, psychological problems and stress. We know about the benefits of keeping the body in good condition. We feel good, look good and we feel mentally alert.

The ancient people decorated themselves with jewellery, body paint and tattoos to beautify their bodies and to express themselves. These traditions have become very popular again. We decorate ourselves with symbols and images that mean something to us and with patterns that we find attractive. We show our beliefs, our identity or to what group or scene we belong.

Body art traditions have often been part of a ritual or even were a ritual itself. Whilst decorating the individual, the artist puts a lot of energy into his or her work. The soon-to-be piece of living art is waiting patiently for the painter to be finished, taking in the energy. This process is very magical. The light pain of getting a tattoo can also put the individual into a light state of trance.

Ancient women, as women today, spent a lot of time on their appearance and had many natural herbal products to enhance their beauty. Natural beauty also comes from within. Learn to like the natural body you have, pamper it from time to time and massage it to feel sensual. If you feel beautiful, young, fresh, energetic and sensual, you will also look good.

Keeping the body healthy is important. We all know that. Be aware of your body, keep it in motion, spend a lot of time outdoors, eat healthy and don't weaken yourself with an excessive intake of alcohol or other stimulants. Try to teach yourself some discipline (…does all this really come from a person who has a craving for cake and chocolate?). Sporting activities are a very good way to release tension and get aggression out of your system in a positive way, the same goes for singing, dancing and playing an instrument.

Meditation is an essential method for relaxing the body, distancing it from day-to-day stress and for concentrating on yourself. If you are not already familiar with a form of relaxation and meditation, it is advisable to find one that suits you.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In ancient societies, it was very common to send a youth into the wilderness for a period of time to seek out the Gods and to find his or

her fate. In other words to communicate with the self and find a purpose in life.

It is just as important today as it was then for an individual to be in isolation for a while. Spend a period of time alone in an isolated natural environment, a cabin in the woods for example, away from TV, books, radio and try to come in contact with your inner self. It might take a few days. Start thinking about yourself: Who are you really, are you satisfied with yourself, what do you like about yourself, what could you improve about yourself? What are your skills, are you using your full potential? Are you confident about yourself? Or are you insecure? What are your problems, your weaknesses and fears? Are you aware of your problems?

Maybe write it all down. Be honest. Admitting to a problem and weakness is certainly a sign of strength, while ignoring or even denying having a problem whilst at the same time clearly showing everyone that you have it, is certainly a sign of ignorance.

If you get the impression that I am trying to say here that I am perfect than you are quite wrong. No human being is flawless, least of all me. I write this chapter just as well for myself, as a reminder.

Are you a freethinking, independent individual? Are you really open-minded? Or are you influenced by the crowd around you? Do you have your own ethics and opinions or are you simply following an ideology? Examine your behaviour towards others. Are you polite, reasonable and natural? Do you take responsibility for your own actions? Do you hold yourself with pride and dignity?

Analysing yourself means learning to understand yourself. Understanding yourself is important for you to understand others. A person, who is insecure and dissatisfied with life, will often let this out on others. In fact it is insecurity and self-hate that is the root of many of the greatest horrors of this world. Without self-respect a person is not likely to treat others with respect. One needs to be confident with oneself to be positive and confident with others.

The same thing applies to personal traits like jealousy and possessiveness. This further suggests insecurity, and the jealous person may believe he or she is not good enough to be loved and respected. Love, respect and loyalty cannot be desperately forced upon others. They have to come naturally, and for that to happen the individual has to love and trust him- or herself first. However, I certainly do not suggest one should be arrogant, because arrogance, the belief in one's own superiority, is often just another a sign of insecurity.

Are you sometimes depressed and do you end up thinking that you are stupid and worthless? Well, just by thinking of yourself as such shows that you are not so at all. It shows that you are sensitive and aware of yourself and the world around you. The really stupid people are too ignorant to ever question their lack of intelligence. Always remember the wise words that the first step to higher thinking is to realise how little you actually know. If you think that you know nothing, it shows that you know a lot!

Dare to be individual, dare to be different. Don't feel intimidated by the ignorance of others. Whether they look at you because you look different or gossip about you, understand that this is because they think you are an interesting person. Should you, however, have any negative experiences due to you being a Pagan, like being accused of doing "evil things in the woods" you must not be intimidated. If you experience discrimination speak up and complain. You must be open about your beliefs. Be proud of them, you are not doing anything wrong – in fact, you're doing quite the opposite.

NATURAL BIRTH AND THE BELOVED PAGAN CHILD

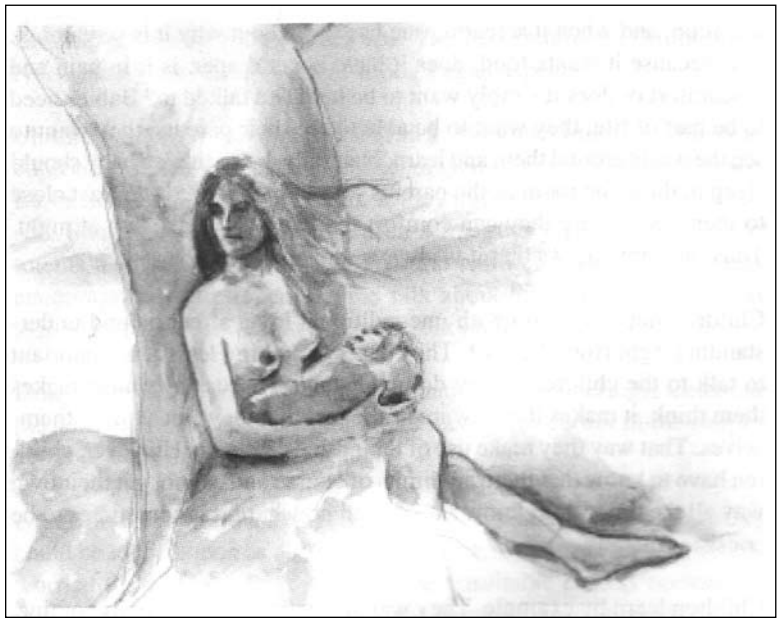
Birth is a sacred and powerful moment. In the former Pagan societies, the pregnant woman was considered to be especially intuitive, more magical and could celebrate her fertility like Mother Earth was also celebrated. She was in union with this great Goddess, harmonious and at peace. During birth other women assisted her. They prepared the area, massaged her, chanted for her and danced for her. Birth has always been woman's own domain.

The midwives that helped at the births had a great deal of wisdom and they were also often the local herbalists. They were consulted for childcare and also knew quite a bit about birth control. It was commonly the midwives who were considered to be witches by the patriarchal authorities. This is yet again an example of how women's mysteries were not understood by men, and the midwives were soon forced out of business. Where in the Pagan societies mainly women handled medicine, the men of the medical profession now attempted to take over this realm of women, thus taking increasingly more of the control over the domain of childbirth and with it, childbirth became considered to be something on par with an illness.

In the teachings of Christianity, childbirth was seen as woman's punishment. This certainly made childbirth become something very negative. It was pain and suffering – woman's ugly purpose in life. Gone were the sacredness of birth, the beauty, the strength, the primal instinct of the woman. Women no longer felt blessed by the Goddess, but instead felt cursed by a male God.

In Western society, childbirth has become something dangerous and too painful to bear. While it is certainly true that childbirth is not without its dangers and can be threatening to both mother and child, the birth itself is a very natural act for which female bodies are well prepared. I think one great reason why childbirth has become such a threat to women's health is because of the ideas we now have of birth.

Women have lost more and more of their natural instincts and, it seems that they have virtually forgotten how to give birth. It is thus no wonder that women today, after centuries of believing childbirth to be dangerous, feel helpless and frightened when they are to give birth. On the other hand, in tribal societies, it can be observed that women in labour simply walk off to a hut to give birth, to return shortly afterwards with their newborn baby wrapped around their body. They give birth easily, quickly and often with no help at all.



Western society focuses too much on the pain of birth, and women who have never learned to deal with pain or to overcome pain often go hysterical with the first contractions. Women today often take the easy way out and demand heavy painkillers, some even ask for a caesarean in order to avoid the pain of childbirth. This could bear a threat to the yet unborn baby who then cannot work together with the mother.

In ancient times, natural remedies were used to ease pain and relax the mother. To bear the pain, the woman mobilized her own great strength. The body releases its own form of morphine (called endorphins) which brought the woman into a state of trance, the same state which is needed in magical workings. So women giving birth were truly in the other side during her labour. This was considered a most sacred and primal moment. This is the idea women should have of birth; the pain will give me primal strength, it will not kill me.

Childbirth is not just a physical experience; it is just as much a psychological one. How can a woman feel meditative and confident when she is in a sterile hospital room with doctors in green operation gowns?

Luckily, over the recent years women have re-conquered the domain of childbirth. The focus is once again on the harmony of the mother and the newborn child. When I speak about natural childbirth, I do not suggest you have your baby in the forest. What it means is to have an active birth, where the woman giving birth is in charge and where she can make use of her own strength, intuition and ability. The woman should be able to choose where and how. If she can expect a normal birth, to do it at home might be ideal. However, today we have birth clinics, or the birth wards of hospitals, where midwives will offer a calm atmosphere. Private rooms are available, where the woman can bring items along that will help her relax, where she can play her own music or take a bath to relieve pain. She can also bring along her own helpers, a few people she would like to have present with her during birth.

The important thing is that the woman should decide the details of her birth well in advance and then discusses her options with her midwife. In Norway, where I live, it has become the norm to go to a midwife for pregnancy check-ups. I think a woman should insist on being referred to a midwife, or at least a female doctor who knows about a midwife's work.

In my own experience birth was very calm, very fast and uncomplicated and I was on my feet again after an hour. Of course I am aware that I might be very lucky compared to many other women. Still I do believe it helps a great deal to prepare the body and mind for birth from the very beginning of a pregnancy. I think it is very important to take care of the body from the start, to do exercises to strengthen the muscles around the pelvic area, massage the areas that are expanding and stretching in order to keep the skin elastic. Try seductive snake-dancing for example (without overdoing it!) to aid movement of the pelvic area. This makes you feel very sensual, too. Communicate with your inner self and listen to your inner voice. Read up on pregnancy and birth. The more you know about it, the better prepared you are and the more confidant you will be.

This might also be the time to communicate with the Norns and the Goddess Frigga, the helper of easy childbirth. Hold ceremonies in honour of her and the sisters of fate and ask them to bless your unborn child.

The pregnant woman should be aware of her intuition; she should feel beautiful, sensual and fertile. Yet, a lot of expecting women feel deformed, ugly and insecure as their bellies are growing.

In fact when our grandmothers, and even mothers were heavy with child, the growing stomach appeared to be something to be embarrassed about. The condition was hidden for as long as possible and when the stomach showed, circumstantial clothes were worn to hide the stomach. The women were seen as unattractive or unsexy – even disabled. A pregnant woman has round shapes, she has a womanly figure and she should show it off proudly! I personally preferred to wear figure-shaped

clothes when I was pregnant, like figure-hugging long dresses.

Show off your body with pride and confidence. Most men certainly find a beautiful woman even more beautiful when she is pregnant. Many women do not dare to expose their stomach and I think this is because people still appear to feel disturbed by a pregnant stomach and expect the woman to hide it away. I am sure a pregnant woman exposing her naked body is regarded by many as shocking. Why is this? What is so disturbing about a baby being in a woman's belly?

Of course pregnancy brings a lot of discomfort as well. Pain, nausea and mood swings can drive you and your partner crazy. Natural therapies, the homeopath, chiropractor, aroma therapist and herbal remedies might be able to help to ease pains and make you feel more harmonious. Healthy food should of course be a must during pregnancy. Cigarettes, alcohol, chemical drugs and narcotics must be strictly avoided, as they quite obviously make the unborn baby suffer! You might feel lousy at times…I surely did, but it is then particularly important for you to treat yourself nicely. Go to the hairdresser, buy great clothes, take a break – anything that will make you feel happy. I have already mentioned sensual dancing. If you want to look good and proud during the last months of pregnancy, it is very important to be aware of your posture.

Pregnancy is a change, not just for the body, but the mind too is expanding and changing. Especially with the first pregnancy, a new phase in life will begin for the woman and during this time in particular, she might experience strong emotions and visions from the past. It seems that, before the baby can come into her life, the negative feelings that have haunted her have to be dealt with. Commonly, childhood memories will come back. I recall severe strange dreams in the beginning of my pregnancy, even recurring nightmares that I had to deal with. I have talked to other women who had similar experiences. You might feel like a child again yourself. This is good, because it reminds you of the love and affection you needed as a child and helps you understand the needs of your arriving baby.

An unborn baby is very perceptive, and lies listening to the outside world. It is able to feel the mother's emotions, and one should be aware that if the mother is sad or fearful, the unborn baby would be frightened. Harsh and loud sounds are also frightening, and you might notice the baby getting a shock if a loud sudden sound occurs.

The mother can make contact with the child in her womb and try to influence the baby with spiritual music, meditation and gentle talking to give it a harmonious experience. You can influence your baby by your choice of music, by reading to it, by relaxing in nature with only the sounds of birds to hear and by telling it what kind of good qualities you want it to have. The father can (and should!) of course do just the same to get in touch with his child. Avoid listening to sounds you don't want your child to be influenced by. Maybe you should undertake a soul-journey, take part in a ceremony to wish good things for your child. This will create a bond between you and the baby, and it will feel wanted, strengthened and secure.

One should be aware that the birth is also a dramatic moment for the baby. A child needs a gentle welcoming into the world. It only has its instincts; it can only feel warmth, love and security – or fear. When the baby is born, it should be laid into its mother's arms, feel her warm body and hear her voice. It should get a good first impression of the world. Sounds rather logical, doesn't it?

Then imagine the way babies were treated in the hospitals up to only a few decades ago. Born in a sterile hospital room, dragged up by its legs, it got a smack on its backside, the umbilical cord was cut and it was separated from its mother. It was washed, weighed, measured, clothed and treated like an object. All the time it was screaming in sheer fright for its mother, who it cannot feel or smell and its instincts tell it that it has been abandoned. The mother may have been allowed to hold it for a brief moment before her baby was carried away to the nursery wardroom where many other lonely little souls also screamed for their mothers. The mothers had no say in this; their babies and themselves were under the control of the hospital authorities. In addition, the

mothers themselves were often treated most disrespectfully.

Thus instead of the wonderful, strong emotions childbirth should give, the mothers felt lonely and intimidated. The babies were only taken out of their cots in order to be changed and fed with bottles like orphans while their mothers lay in bed with hurting breasts containing the colostrum, the first milk that is so necessary for the babies in order to build up their immune-system. Yet, she was told that the man-made milk was best for the baby. As we know today, they were completely wrong!

The mother's milk is the only right nourishment for the baby. This milk will build up the child's immune system, and it should be breast-fed for as long as possible. Not only for the nutritional value, but also for the comfort, security and closeness to the mother. Breast-fed babies indeed are believed to learn quicker and develop faster than bottle-fed babies. Unbelievably, not so long ago, breast-feeding a baby in public was banned. The mothers were made to go to a closed room, hidden away from the crowds. This is not only extremely discriminating for the women, but also for the babies.

Breast-feeding is the most natural thing in the world. The breast is there in order to feed the offspring with and when this is seen as exposing yourself in public, something is wrong. Luckily, this attitude has changed and today, at least in Northern European countries, mothers feed their babies whenever and wherever they get hungry. If we sit in a cafe to have a meal, the baby deserves to be fed too.

The intimidated women of the past decades had no idea how to trust their instincts and they often blindly followed the instructions of the healthcare authorities. I have been told that it was common to give a bottle every four to five hours. In the meantime, the baby was supposed to lie in its room and was ignored, even when it was screaming in hunger. After all, the experts claimed, the baby only screams to control the mother and it has to learn who is the boss. And besides, screaming is good for the lungs…

What was wrong with people back then? How could they have been so heartless?! Leaving a baby screaming is the worst thing to do. The baby feels abandoned. A small helpless baby deserves to get immediate attention, and when it screams, one has to find out why it is screaming. Is it because it wants food, does it have a wet diaper, is it in pain and discomfort or does it simply want to be held and talked to? Babies need to be part of life, they want to be able to see their parents, they want to see the world around them and learn. Naturally, I also think a baby should sleep in the same room as the parents - close to their bed, where they can talk to the baby and touch it if it wakes up at night. Thus the baby knows that it is always safe and loved.

Children must grow up with unconditional love, affection and understanding right from the start. They deserve nothing less! It is important to talk to the children – they do understand. Discussing things makes them think, it makes them aware of the fact that they can express themselves. That way they make use of their minds early on. But of course, children have to know that there are limits and rules, and cannot get their own way all the time. Consistent rules are in fact very necessary for them to make them feel content and secure.

Children learn by example. They watch you, imitate your daily routine, the way you talk, the way you care for them and cuddle with them, the way you behave and treat each other around the house. It is amazing and often hilarious to see how they do things exactly the way we do. Sometimes I also get really moved when I watch my daughter – how loving and kind she is. Children surely reflect the home they are coming from. I strongly feel that disrespect and ignorance are firstly taught in the home. An ignorant or even violent home will also often teach violence to their children!

As Pagans it would only be natural that we teach our children our passions and teach them to respect Mother Earth and animals. We should encourage them to feel their inner nature and open their minds. In ancient times, children surely sat around a fireplace whilst a storyteller told tales of myths and legends. Stories like this served to

enhance the imagination and creativity in the children. We should tell our children myths, legends, fables and poetry. Sing them lullabies – I often sing my daughter one of my own ballads by her bedside. Actually, many children programs these days have become quite Pagan, magical and fantasy inspired…and we have Harry Potter and their like of course…

Children naturally have occult abilities. They can often see things an adult cannot and this should be encouraged. Ask them what they see, for example, or whom they talk to, if they have a friend that you cannot see. Shamans believe that children's imaginary friends are in fact totems and spiritual guardians. Ask the children about their dreams, encourage them to remember and talk about their dreams. If you are skilled in magic, you can try to pass your abilities on to your child.

Bring them along to Pagan gatherings. Celebrate meaningful ceremonies for them (like mentioned earlier in the chapter about celebrating personal events).

Our children are supposed to be free and they have the right to learn about the reality of life in their own way. The child should always be allowed to be a part of the outside world, not shut away from it. As long as we have given them a strong mind, independence and love on their way, they won't suddenly close their minds and become narrow-minded. They will always keep in mind the wisdom you told them and the understanding you showed towards them. If they have learned to feel their inner nature, respect the environment and acknowledge the natural forces around us...then they have the Pagan-spirit.

Anyway, when all is said, this chapter is merely based on my thoughts and experiences. I cannot speak for childbirth, childcare and education in general and your experiences might be very different from mine.

Alva

Sweet laughter fills the air tonight
A journey has begun
To fantasy forests, where wishes come true
Where animals talk and legends live

Little leaf boat in the moonbeam glides
A crystal palace in sight
Loveliest girl barefoot into the grass leaps
Joy of the elven world greet them from me

Oh, Alva, winds singing mild
"grace to the fairies for the elven child"
May the North-star be your guide
May it shine upon you bright

Hear the language of the woods
Seek the treasures of the hidden realm
You enchant us with your loving smile
May the magic ever dance in your heart

GARMENTS AND ACCESSORIES FOR MAGICAL PURPOSES

In the Erik den Raudes Saga, the Volva is described wearing a long blue gown (blue is the colour sacred to Odin) set with stones along the hem. She wore a hood made from lambskin adorned with cat-fur and a blue cape. The inside of her gloves were made from wild cat-fur (because the cat is the animal sacred to Freya) and boots made from calfskin. To get hold of cat-fur could be a problem these days (I suggest you collect the fallen hair of your own cat and knit the hair into the inside of the gloves...). The Volva required a large animal-fur for her to sit on or which she would wrap around her during her trance. She carried a staff and a leather-bag on her belt, containing objects of power, such as beads, herbs, bones, claws and stones. The staff was her symbol of status.

The Godi and Gydja, the priest and priestess of the Northern tradition also wore a blue gown or cloak. The robe of the traditional magician is blue as well, ornamented with magical symbols, runes, stars and moons.

THE RED CAP

A red cap was worn by individuals who were special, individuals who were set aside, if not above, ordinary society. Later in medieval times the Church viewed individuals who wore a red cap as heretics. As I have mentioned before, the red cap or cloak has been associated with the Fly Agar.

ACCESSORIES

Small leather-pouches were worn around the neck or attached to the belt. The bags contained small items of value, beads, herbs, talismans, etc. A knife was also often attached to the belt. Both men and women adorned themselves with jewellery, often made from bronze, gold, silver, amber or colourful glass-pearls. Both men and women liked to wear a little make-up around the eyes.

MAGICAL BELTS AND GIRDLES

A belt with pockets can contain magical items or talismans. A cord with a knot can be used around robes in order to channel the energy. A girdle of natural wolf-skin was worn in the old days to shape-shift, to change into a wolf. Magical belts and girdles can also be wrapped around an object. Don't forget that for many magical rituals it is also suitable to be "skyclad" (nude).

SOURCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

It would be impossible to list all the books and sources that have inspired me. Many of my sources are also personal observances, common folklore and individuals that inspired me. Below you will find a list with a small selection of books and films that have provided me with information for this book and/or that I recommend to the reader…(and there are surely many more good books in existence that I don't know about…)

The Prose Edda – Snorre Sturluson
Beowolf – An ancient Anglo-Saxon poem
(there are different editions, try to find the newest translations)
The Norsemen - Myths and Legends - H.A. Guerber - Studio Editions
Teutonic Mythology – Jakob Grimm
Practical Magic in the Northern Tradition - Nigel Pennick – Aquarian
(check out the other books by Nigel Pennick)
Leaves of Yggdrasil - Freya Aswynn - Llewellyn
The Road to Hel – Hilda R. Ellis - Cambridge
The Working Dictionary of the Norse Gods- Sven Harnesson – Coxland Press – (A private pressing for members of the Order of the Jarls of Balder)
Northern Magic - Edred Thorsson - Llewellyn
Ultima Thule – The Vanished Northern Homeland – Bernhard King
Viking – Eyewitness Guides – Dorling Kindersley
Die Germanen – Was ist Was Buecher
Kampen om Nordvegen – Torgrim Titlestad - Fagbokforlaget
Den Enøyde - Tor Åge Bringsværd - Gyldendal Norsk Forlag
Vikingen - Bokførlaget Bra Bøcker AB
Norner og Volver - Oldsaksamlingen, Historisk Museum - Universitetet i Oslo
Jordens Moder i Norden - Brigitta Onsell

Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain – Ed. by the Readers Digest Association Ltd. London (a fascinating book about British folk customs and lore, fables, witches, ghosts etc.)
Natural Magic - Francoise Strachan – London (a quite "New Agy" book, but it has many meaningful ceremonies to bring you in touch with nature)
The Celtic Tradition – Caitlin Matthews - Element
Brewer - The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable - Wordsworth
Prehistoric England - Richard Cavendish - Artus books
Gebrueder Grimm- Kinder- und Hausmaerchen
A Modern Herbal - Mrs. Maude Grieve
The Herb Book - John Lust - Bantam Books
Hexenkraut und Zaubertrank - Hartwig Abraham, Inge Thinnes - Urs Freund Verlag

The Antichrist - Friedrich Nietzsche
Beyond Good and Evil - Friedrich Nietzsche
Philosophy For Beginners - Richard Osborne - Writers and Readers
Taboo: "The Ecstasy of Evil" - The Psychopathology of Sex and Religion - Christopher S. Hyatt Ph.D., Lon Milo DuQuette & Gary Ford - New Falcon
Prometheus Rising - Robert Anton Wilson – Falcon
Liber Null and Psychonaut - Peter J. Carroll - Samuel Weiser

The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets – Barbara G. Walker
Song of Eve - Manuela Dunn Marcetti
The Satanic Witch – Anton Lavey – Feral House
Brother Wolf – A Forgotten Promise – Jim Brandenburg – NorthWord
(a most beautiful book about wolves, with really great nature pictures)

Flowers of Evil - Charles Baudelaire

The Picture of Dorian Grey - Oscar Wilde
The Chants of Maldoror - Comte Lautreamont
(In general writers of the Decadence period, their surreal and poetic stories show an interesting and advanced outlook on society and human nature)

Documentaries:
National Geographic Television by the National Geographic Society:
Lost Civilisations, Animals in myths and legends
Animal Planet, Discovery
The Crusaders, Terry Jones, BBC UK

Films:
All by David Lynch – greatly inspired by dreams, my favorite film maker!
Gormenghast – a bizarre and fantastic mix of myths and magical symbolism
Robin Hood – the original British series, very occult and Pagan
Harry Potter – of course, fantastic!
The Company of Wolves – inspired by the original myth of Red Riding Hood
The Crow… and many more.

Nebelhexe has inspired, enchanted (and puzzled!) the alternative music scene since the mid 90's. Her songs express her deep thoughts, feelings, dreams, visions, obscure experiences and the magic that is surrounding her.

Her early love for British gothic, new wave and underground music brought her to London in '90 where she soon became part of the subculture scenes. Always searching, and always having had an understanding for the supernatural, life's mysteries and animals, she connected with various magic/pagan/witch circles. Seeking to explore the shadow-side, she became a known act with notorious artistic performances and a model in the fetish scene.

Nebelhexe made quite an impact with the obscure ghostly dark-ambient project Aghast which was released in '94. She was also the woman behind the passionate folk- and tribal melodies of Hagalaz' Runedance, a project she dedicated to the pagan spirituality of northern Europe. Hagalaz' Runedance became very popular and hit the German album charts.

Her writings and comments became quite respected. She dares to speak against the inhibiting patriarchal religions that demonised our nature. Many of her social-critical articles and comments are printed in alternative magazines and also in the biggest Norwegian tabloid papers and popular magazines.

Dark and alluring, strong and spirited, melancholic and passionate, sensual and poetic, aggressive and feminine, charming and certainly stubborn... Nebelhexe is a multi-artist who clearly runs her own show. Often she is referred to as being one of the most intriguing personalities of the subculture. And many simply don't get her. Her music is placed in many different boxes and always falls inbetween categories. She is her own person and stands by her art and ideals.

Nebelhexe is working on quite many projects, so please keep updated.

The official websites:
www.nebelhexe.com
www.myspace.com/nebelhexe
www.myspace.com/officialhagalazrunedance

“The ancient Pagan religions are not just weird forgotten rites from the past, irrelevant to our modern lives. By discovering the old mysteries we can learn to understand ourselves.”

“The Ancient Fires of Midgard” reveals Andrea Haugen’s insight to the Pagan spirituality of Northern Europe - from a very personal point of view. She talks about topics such as Northern mythology, nature’s mysteries and the wisdom within ourselves, feminine mysteries and the magic of the wise women, natural childbirth, the natural lore and how to get in contact with the animal spirit.

Andrea, better known as the recording artist Nebelhexe, explains why it is so important for us to remember the Pagan perception of life and she does not step back from criticising society and the dogmatic patriarchal religions that aimed to suppress our nature within.

NEBELHEXE 2008

Loved this book?
Other books that may be interesting to you:

Ann Groa Sheffield : "Groa Top Nine Heathen Books"

Because my List of Recommended Heathen Reading keeps getting longer Ive put together a shorter list to in an effort to help someone who is brand-new to all of this and doesnt know where to start. Lets begin with the Top Three Books for the Neophyte Heathen Ann Groa Sheffield

The Troth : "Welcome To The Troth Honoring The Northern Tradition"

The Troth is dedicated to exploring practicing and promoting the pre-Christian religion of the Germanic peoples who include the English Norwegians Icelanders Swedes and Germans among others. This religion is known by various names including Asatru Heathenry the Elder Troth and others. There are many variations in beliefs and practices within this faith and many ways of describing and classifying these differences. One thing... >>read more<<